Peter Adams

Coaching that shifts what years of thinking hasn't.

FOR THE TRUTHWORKS COMMUNITY

You can be doing fine and still be running on empty

I built a diagnostic called the Freelance Wheel of Work, because the pressure in independent consulting right now is almost never one big problem you can point at: it is eight different-sized smaller ones, and most people can describe the general weight of it long before they know how to address it. The wheel - a diagnostic, not a satisfaction survey - will help with both.

That distinction is worth getting hold of early. "I am tired" and "I am tired because three of my four clients now expect AI-speed turnaround at last year's rate" technically describe the same feeling. Only the second one tells you where the actual problem is.

Three pressures are landing on the same person at once

The pool of available independent talent is bigger than it was. Companies that hired heavily have spent the last stretch cutting back, and freezes on replacing the people who leave have pushed a lot of experienced professionals into independent work, all of them looking at a similar set of projects.

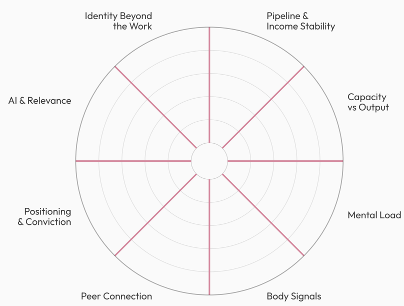
At the same time, AI was all abuzz and being sold to a lot of leadership teams as a fast, cheap answer, and the reality of what the tools actually do has been catching up with what clients expect for months now. A deliverable that used to take three days can be roughed out in an hour with a tool your client also has access to, and it is changing what clients expect to pay for the work itself.

The third pressure is quieter than the other two. Doing the work and winning the work are two different skills, and with more experienced people chasing the same projects, the second one is being asked for more than it was. Whether you have had much cause to use that skill before is worth knowing. Being good at the work is not the part in question.

What all of this does is make the pressure uneven, and uneven pressure tends to take a toll after a while.

The Freelance Wheel of Work puts the pressure somewhere specific

You can draw the wheel by hand, or skip straight to the printable version of this article and worksheet at peteradams.coach/freelance-wheel-of-work. If you are drawing it by hand, start by drawing a circle, split it into eight even segments, and label them:



- **Pipeline and income stability:** how much of the last six months came from one client, and what happens if that client goes.
- **Capacity versus output:** whether you have quietly taken on more than you have room for.
- **Mental load:** how much of running the business lives in your head rather than in a system.
- **Body signals:** what your body has been telling you while you have been filing it under stress.
- **Peer connection:** who you can think a bad week through with, other than a client.

- **Positioning and conviction:** whether you still believe the offer you are describing.
- **AI and relevance:** whether you are ahead of or behind what AI is changing about your value.
- **Identity beyond the work:** how much of you exists outside the client work.

Those one-liners are enough to score yourself. The worksheet gives each area its own diagnostic question and a fuller prompt, if you want more than the headline before you mark it.

Then score each one on how resourced you feel there right now, today, rather than on how it looks on paper. A dot on each spoke, close to the centre if you are running thin, further out if you genuinely have something in reserve, and then join the dots up. What you get is a spider graph shape, and seeing it on paper in front of you shows you pretty quickly that you can be doing fine in an area and still be running on empty in it. It is that gap, rather than the lowest number on the page, that tells you where to put the next 48 hours.

Give yourself 10 minutes.

Two of the eight catch people out more than the rest.

AI and relevance is the one area you can test in an hour

The question underneath it: is AI changing what clients will pay you for, and are you ahead of that or behind it?

Rather than answer that from a feeling, run it. Take one deliverable you produced in the last month, put the raw brief into an AI tool, and look at what comes back. Initially, this might be uncomfortable, but the useful part is the gap between what the tool produced and what you would have produced, because that gap, specifically, is what your offer currently is. A wide gap suggests you are fine, and possibly charging too little for your own judgement. A narrow one is worth knowing now rather than in six months, because it tells you exactly where to start differentiating yourself from AI.

Positioning and conviction is the one that goes quiet first

The question here is harder to sit with: are you still convinced by the offer you are selling?

You can keep delivering something well and still feel yourself go flat every time you describe it. The small tells arrive well ahead of the big one: you soften the pitch, you add a caveat you did not used to add, you let the client set the scope because arguing for your own version is not worth this week's energy, you are quietly relieved when a call gets cancelled. Usually what that adds up to is drift: the work you are most interested in now has moved away from the work you are actually selling, and you have not quite named that to yourself yet. It is rarely a sign that you have got worse at the work.

Score the shape, then pick the area that surprised you

What the wheel gives you is a location. That is a harder thing to produce from memory than a general verdict on how the year is going, and a far more useful one.

So print the worksheet, or finish marking the one above if you have been drawing along, and pick one area to work on: the one that surprised you, rather than automatically the lowest score. Then decide what you want to do about it: one action inside the next 48 hours, small enough that you will actually do it and specific enough that you will know when it is done. If pipeline was the one, that might be as small as opening your invoicing and working out what percentage of the last six months came from your single biggest client. My guess is you already know which area and what action it is going to be.

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

- Eight areas, one shape: pipeline, capacity, mental load, body signals, peers, positioning, AI, identity.
- AI & relevance and positioning & conviction catch more people out than the other six.
- The move is one specific 48-hour action, not a general intention to look at all eight.

Peter Adams is a life coach and strategic partner based in Ibiza, working with senior professionals and independent consultants worldwide. Half deep pattern work, half strategic accountability, with facilitation and coaching contracts across adidas, Philips, ACICS and dsm-firmenich. If you want to talk about working together one to one, everything is at peteradams.coach.

If positioning and conviction was the one that hit hardest just now, that is exactly what the next session for this community goes at: how much you still believe in the work you are delivering. I am calling it the Conviction Check. Keep an eye out for it.

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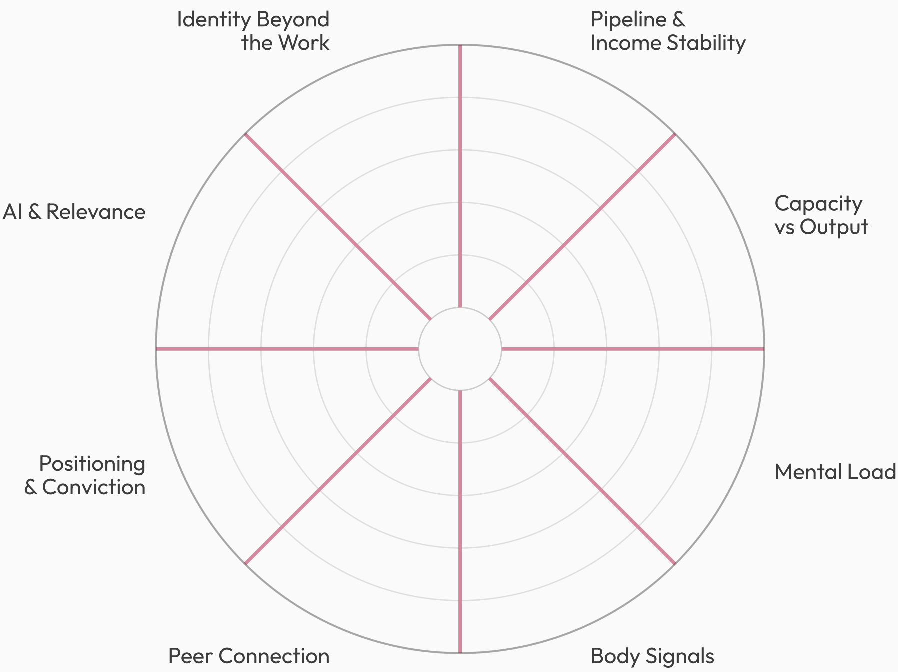
The Freelance Wheel of Work

The Freelance Wheel of Work is a diagnostic, not a satisfaction survey. The pressure of working independently is rarely one big problem you can point at: it is eight different-sized smaller ones, and most people can describe the general weight of it long before they know how to address it. This page is for finding the specific area it is landing in, which is the part you can actually do something about. You can be doing fine in an area and still be running on empty in it, and that gap, rather than the lowest number on the page, is the thing worth seeing.

The wheel below is ready to mark. For each of the eight areas, put a dot on its spoke: close to the centre if you are running thin there right now, further out if you genuinely have something in reserve. Score how it feels today, not how it looks on paper. Then join the dots up and look at the shape. Give yourself 10 minutes.



Pipeline & Income Stability

How predictable and diversified is your income?

Look at where the money actually came from over the last six months, rather than where you would like it to come from. If one client or one type of work could disappear and take more than half of it with them, that is the number this area is asking about.

Peer Connection

Who actually sees your work, not just the output?

Notice how many of your conversations this month were with clients, and how often you were the one holding the room. When a piece of work lands badly, and sometimes it does, this area is whether you have anyone to think it through with who is not being billed for the privilege.

Capacity vs Output

Are you trading future capacity for present income?

This is about whether you have already said yes to more than you have room for, quietly, without it ever becoming a decision. If proposal writing and thinking time have drifted into evenings and weekends, that drift is the signal, not the size of the workload.

Positioning & Conviction

Are you still convinced by the offer you're selling?

You can be delivering something well and still feel yourself go flat every time you describe it. Watch for the small tells rather than a big one: softened pitches, extra caveats, letting the client set the scope because arguing for your own version is not worth this week's energy.

Mental Load

How heavy is the "CEO of everything" tax right now?

Strategist, seller, delivery, admin, credit control: most of it lives in your head rather than in a system or a document you could hand to anyone. The tiredness in this area tends to come less from the work itself than from never being fully off the hook for any of it.

AI & Relevance

Is AI changing what clients will pay you for, and are you ahead of it or behind it?

If a client could get a rough version of your last deliverable from a tool in an hour, the honest question is what you are adding on top of that now. If the value has moved from the deliverable to your judgement, this area is whether your pricing has caught up with that yet.

Body Signals

What is your body telling you that you're ignoring?

This one usually turns up in the same few places: sleep, jaw, shoulders, the appointment you keep meaning to book. You most likely already know your answer here, and how quickly it arrived is itself part of the score.

Identity Beyond the Work

Who are you when the work stops, and does it scare you?

Notice whether introducing yourself and describing your work have become the same sentence, and whether a quiet week feels like something has gone wrong with you rather than with the pipeline. Answer this one the way you would answer it to someone who knows you, not the way you would answer it on LinkedIn.

YOUR ONE ACTION

First, pick the area that surprised you, not necessarily the lowest score.

Then decide what you want to do about it: one action inside the next 48 hours, small enough that you will actually do it, specific enough that you will know when it is done. One example for each area:

- Pipeline and income stability: open your invoicing and work out what percentage of the last six months came from your single biggest client. Write the number down.
- Capacity versus output: count the hours in your calendar already committed for the next four weeks, and compare that to the hours you actually want to work.
- Mental load: write out every open loop you are carrying, admin and client work together. Pick three and close them this week.
- Body signals: name the one signal you have been overriding, in a sentence, to one other person. Then do the one thing that follows from saying it: book the appointment, or block the hour.
- Peer connection: message one peer whose judgement you rate and ask for 30 minutes about your work, not theirs. Put a date in the diary before you close the message thread.
- Positioning and conviction: take your current offer description and mark the sentences you no longer believe. Do not rewrite it yet, just count them.
- AI and relevance: put the raw brief from a recent deliverable into an AI tool. The gap between what comes back and what you would have done is your offer.
- Identity beyond the work: do one thing in the next 48 hours with no professional use that you would not mention on LinkedIn.

Write yours down before you close this page.