

Betting on the Vision: Reflections from a Creative Entrepreneur in the Age of AI

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There was a season in my life when I frequently walked in nature. I walked barefoot in the grass more often than I slept in a bed. Not because I had the luxury of time, but because nature walks were the only place I could slow down long enough to reflect, count my blessings, and hold myself accountable to a vision and its actions that demanded everything from me. This is the season I'm in and it's the one I want to share.

Passion: Creating Beyond the Canvas

I came to the United States from Tanzania sixteen years ago as a teenager. I went to high school here, played sports, then enrolled at Washington & Jefferson College. I was all pumped and excited about the promise of higher learning, doing a double major in Political Science, and Philosophy, with an Art minor and a Pre- Law concentration. After two years, I realized for me the pursuit and passion for higher learning was not going to be fulfilled solely from the classroom, I was yearning for more. So I made the decision to leave and pursue creative entrepreneurship full-time, my first real taste of entrepreneurship's pressure.

That led to my first venture, Liberate Arts, an online platform where creatives anywhere in the world could build a digital portfolio and sell their work without ever touching a shipping label. We integrated with fulfillment providers so artists could focus on creating while the platform handled printing, shipping, and delivery. It wasn't profitable, but it taught us something more valuable: artists didn't just need a marketplace. They needed help with everything that pulled them away from their work.

That insight became a consulting practice serving creatives: business strategy, branding, digital presence, full platforms for community organizations. Serving nonprofits deepened our creative advocacy, which led us to formalize Liberate X, a nonprofit offering fiscal sponsorship, grant writing, and capacity-building to grassroots organizations and artists. For over five years, we impacted creatives I'd once stood beside as a frustrated artist myself. I had promised myself I wouldn't be a spectator complaining about what was missing, I'd be part of building what was needed. That promise has shaped every chapter since.

Growth: Becoming a Student Again

When COVID hit, I decided to go back to school technically, not formally - through Harvard's CS50 and MIT's open online courses. I learned Python, moved from language to language, picked up projects, and in 2020 coded my first progressive web application: an Uber-style delivery app built through a course, which I immediately imagined serving artists and small

creative businesses locked down and unable to move their work. It was rough, but it showed me what was possible.

That same season, I took a job that became a mainstay for the next five years: program coordinator at Open Field, a sports-based youth development nonprofit in Pittsburgh founded by Justin Forzano after his travels to Africa, where he saw how soccer brings communities together. Open Field serves immigrant and refugee youth from East Africa, Tanzania, the Congo, Somalia, the Middle East, and beyond, giving them community, connection, and a bridge into a new culture through a sport they already love. As an immigrant myself, I knew what it felt like to arrive without a guide who understood where I came from, but I also remembered how critically helpful being able to play soccer and being part of a team was for me during my teenage years as a kid from a different country, with a different culture and language altogether. I wanted to be that person they can relate to, who would be a mentor for them.

So I coached. I was the head coach for the boys on the field, and off the field I built a youth leadership curriculum for both boys and girls, covering time management, goal setting, and the essentials of becoming a young leader. I took that job intentionally, knowing it would force me to refine my leadership acumen, the same discipline I needed as an artist taking commissions, and as a co-founder running Liberate X. I'd tell my players: set goals that scare you, inspect what you expect, and never believe you're done growing.

Five years later, I had to take my own advice. I reflected on what had been achieved at Liberate X, at Open Field, in my portfolio and in my character and asked what skills I had been learning and aligned with but hadn't yet fully expressed. The answer was technology, and specifically AI. That's what carried me into founding EthersFlow.

Gratitude: The Ground Beneath the Climb

I'm grateful in ways this page can't fully hold. For the youth I mentored, relationships that continue to this day who trusted me with their growth. For an ecosystem of entrepreneurs, community organizations, and change-makers who taught me more than any classroom. For an amazing friend, Matheus, who influenced me to dive deep and take curiosity one step at a time. For contracts that kept the lights on while I built. For barefoot walks, poems, reflections, and for those introspective, silent inspirations that led to the occasional moments with a paintbrush.

EthersFlow is my current bet, an AI trust company focused on safety, alignment, and the unpredictable nature of large language models. Our answer is an action gate: a layer that checks and verifies AI actions against policy before they happen, so agentic applications can be deployed with reduced risk and real alignment with human good. We earned National Science Foundation support, joined the I-Corps Hub at Cornell for product-market fit research, and launched an MVP and MCP tool for developers. Now I'm wearing every hat - CTO, fundraiser, talking to VCs through our pre-seed round while building a team of dedicated, passionate people.

These past three years have been the most challenging of my life. Hundreds, maybe thousands of hours of code and debugging. Nineteen months of very little sleep. From the outside it looked like putting all my eggs in one basket. In truth, it was betting on myself and learning what I'm not yet: a better communicator, a faster actor on the things I procrastinate on, someone whose self-inspection must move from reflection to action.

I've learned gratitude can't be passive, not for me. It has to be intentional, inspected, and converted into action. Growth is the reward for existing with intention, and passion is what drives us to do more than we must. Right now, I'm doing more than I must, and I'm grateful for the chance to.