
ENTREPRENEURIAL TRADES ACADEMY

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CROSS THE VAST GAP

*From Maxed-Out Tradesman
to Business Owner*

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25 years in the trades. Built from the ground up.

Contents

- Meet Jack Freeman Altrades.....3
- The Great Aspirations Problem.....6
- The Opportunity and the Gap.....8
- The Bridge..... 10
 - Why Jack Needs a Bridge..... 10
 - What the Bridge Does..... 11
 - The Bridge Is There..... 12
- Who Built This and Why..... 13
 - Why ETA Exists..... 14
 - The Tools..... 14
- The Founding 300..... 16

Meet Jack Freeman Altrades

Meet Jack F Altrades, the F stands for Freeman, however Jack is anything but that.

Jack, like most of us, entered the trades at an early age and he found that he enjoyed the work. He in fact started to fall in love with it and he found enough satisfaction in the work that he decided to make a career out of it.

Like all new careers in the beginning, money was tight because he was at the bottom of the ladder and wasn't earning much because he was missing the skills and the experience. He was a good employee though. He was hardly ever late, in fact most days he was early. He was an eager learner and a hard worker — he just did not possess the skills he needed to be at the top of the game. Not yet, but that would change over time.

As the years went on, Jack grew in his trade. He kept adding to his skills. Learning new things, applying them to his work and course correcting when needed. He was growing. Each new skill made him more valuable, and the more valuable he became meant more money his employer was willing to pay.

Value Added Skills (VAS)

The skills a tradesman builds over a career that directly increase their market value and earning power as an employee. The more you learn, the more you earn.

As Jack progressed, his earnings grew — and so did his life. That's typical, especially when you're young and just getting started in life. He met a girl. They got married. An apartment became a house. One kid became two. None of it was planned exactly, it just happened the way life does, one thing leads to the next until one day you look around and realize you've got a mortgage, utilities, car payments, and a refrigerator that needs to stay full because little mouths can't feed themselves. Real bills. That meant Jack needed real money.

It wasn't that he didn't earn well. He was paid top dollar for what he knew. After years in the trade he was a master — knew his tools and the workflow as well as he knew the back of his hand. The problem wasn't the knowledge, or the mastery of the skills which kept Jack from making ends meet. The problem was that at the top of the ladder there's a ceiling.

There was simply no more room to grow on the earnings side of things. And when you factored in the time off between jobs, the weather delays, the

foreman calling it early on a slow Friday — the money wasn't always as reliable as it needed to be. He'd sit in his truck on those days watching the rain hit the windshield, knowing the day was done, knowing the week just got a little shorter. It added up.

That made his lifestyle hard to maintain. It was nothing extravagant, mind you. Just an everyday, average blue-collar life. The kind most people would look at and not think twice about. But the math wasn't mathing.

The writing was on the wall. He had topped out as an employee. More trade skills weren't going to change that. He wasn't living beyond his means — there was nothing left to cut. Life had simply grown to the edge of what his paycheck could hold, and it wasn't going to shrink back down on its own.

Value Added Skills Threshold (VAST)

The point in a tradesman's career where they have maxed out their hourly earning potential as an employee. No matter how much more they learn, the market will not pay them more for it.

To pick up the slack Jack would take the occasional side job. Cash work for friends and family, small projects here and there. It was through those jobs that he started to see something clearly. He'd wrap up a small job for a neighbor, stand back and look at the work, and know without a single doubt that what he had just done was worth real money. The skills he had spent years building had value, real value, out in the open market. He knew that people were lining up to spend money on exactly what he had to offer. He just wasn't the one collecting it.

That thought started to stick.

Jack had no doubts about his ability as a tradesman. That part he was sure of. What gave him pause was everything else. He could do every single thing needed to make a customer say wow. But all he had ever done was show up, strap on his tools, and go to work. Someone else found the jobs. Someone else priced them. Someone else dealt with the headaches. Jack just worked. And he was good at it. But good at the work and good at running a business are two very different things, and he knew it.

Jack was stuck. He was sitting on the edge of a cliff, staring across a chasm that brings death to the majority of those who try to cross it, contemplating. He had reached his limit as an employee, but it's all he had ever known. On this side everything familiar to him — the crew, the routine, the steady, even if unpredictable paycheck. On the other side was something he couldn't fully see yet. His own business. His own name on the truck. His own calls to make.

Uncapped market potential. The thought of it was equal parts exciting and terrifying, which is probably why he hadn't made a move yet. Life had brought him here. Now life was waiting on him.

“Life had brought him here. Now life was waiting on him.”

Jack had a decision to make.

The Great Aspirations Problem

Jack had been standing at the edge for a while now. Not literally, of course — he was still showing up to work every day, still doing what he did better than just about anyone on the crew. But in his mind, he had been standing at the edge of something, staring across at a life that looked a lot better than the one he was living. He just couldn't figure out how to get there.

What Jack had was Great Aspirations. What Jack had was a Problem. The combination of those two things has a name: the Great Aspirations Problem, and Jack had it bad.

Great Aspirations Problem (GAP)

The divide that separates a tradesman's current skills plateau from the business ownership they aspire to. It is the overarching chasm caused by reaching the VAST — wide, deep, and impossible to cross without a bridge.

The aspiration was simple enough. Self-employment. His own business. His own name on the truck. He had the skills to back it up — nobody who had ever watched Jack work would argue that. He could find side jobs. He had proven that much. But finding a side job for a neighbor and actually running a business are two completely different animals, and somewhere in the back of his mind Jack knew it. He wasn't sure he could keep the lights on, keep the work coming in, and — most importantly — keep from losing money. The skills that made him exceptional on a job site didn't automatically transfer to success on a profit and loss statement.

This was the GAP. Not just the gap between where he was and where he wanted to be, but the full weight of what that crossing was going to require. On his side stood everything he had built — years of hard-earned trade mastery, his Value Added Skills, his reputation as a craftsman. All of it capped out. All of it topped out. The years of hard work and growth in his trade had brought him as far as it could.

On the other side was something different entirely. Uncapped earnings. A business that grew because of systems and teams and not just because he personally swung a hammer. Real financial freedom. It was right there, visible from where he stood. And the distance between the two felt like standing at the edge of a canyon with no bridge in sight.

As Jack rightfully envisioned it, the canyon had real depth too. It wasn't just wide — it was deep. Crossing it wasn't just a matter of learning a few new things. It meant evolving. Completely. Shedding the identity of the employee and building something new from the ground up.

Every layer of what it meant to run a real business — estimating, marketing, sales, hiring, managing money, managing people, managing time — was stacked below him like the walls of that canyon, each one demanding to be understood before the next one could be climbed.

Daunting Evolutionary Enhancement Process (DEEP)

The vertical depth of the GAP — the stacked layers of business knowledge a tradesman must work through to become a successful business owner. A true metamorphosis, not just a learning curve.

And doing it alone? That was the part that kept him up at night.

Because the only path Jack could see from where he was standing was straight down into the DEEP and then back up the other side on his own. No map. No guide. Just trial and error, guesswork, and the very real possibility of costly mistakes at every turn. A bad estimate that costs him more than he made. A job that goes sideways with no one to call. A slow month that drains what little he saved. Every step forward carrying the risk of sliding two steps back.

Costly Labor Intensive Mistakes & Backslidings (CLIMB)

The brutal reality of going it alone — the expensive errors, wasted effort, and steps backward that come when a skilled tradesman tries to figure out business ownership without a roadmap or guide.

Jack wasn't a quitter. But he wasn't reckless either. He could see the full picture from where he stood. The VAST that stopped him here, the GAP in front of him, the DEEP below, and a CLIMB on the other side that would beat most men down before they ever reached the top. He had Great Aspirations. The Problem was everything standing between him and them.

He just needed a way across.

The Opportunity and the Gap

Jack's story is not unique. In fact, if you have spent any real time in the trades, there is a good chance his story sounds a lot like yours. Most tradesmen reach a version of the same wall. You get good, really good, and the money follows for a while. Then one day it stops following. The ceiling appears. You hit your VAST and life keeps moving forward whether your paycheck does or not.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with being a skilled tradesman. It is honest work, it is valuable work, and the world needs people who can do it well. But there is a level to it. A ceiling that no amount of additional skill will raise. And underneath that ceiling, whether you feel it yet or not, is the quiet cost of trading your hours for dollars. Every hour you don't work is an hour you don't get paid. Every rain delay, every slow week, every day the foreman calls it early is money you are never getting back. You are not building anything. You are exchanging time for a check and starting over every Monday.

Jack's middle name is Freeman. The irony is not lost. Jack is anything but a free man. He shows up when someone else tells him to. He goes home when someone else says so. His income is decided by someone else's pricing, someone else's schedule, and someone else's weather call. Self-employment looks like freedom from where he's standing — and it can be when done right. But done wrong, it trades one set of chains for another. You can quit your job and find yourself a slave to a business that barely covers your bills, burning through the time and money you invested just to stay afloat, and in the worst cases, losing it all and walking away with less than you started with.

The risk is real. It deserves to be said plainly. But so does the opportunity.

The trades are one of the most fertile grounds for building a real business in the entire American economy. Think about that for a moment.

9%

of businesses across ALL industries ever reach \$1 million in annual revenue.

33%

of trade businesses reach \$1 million in annual revenue — one in three.

The opportunity is not just good — it is better here than almost anywhere else. The demand is strong, the labor shortage is real, and customers are willing to pay premium prices for skilled, professional, reliable contractors who show up and do what they say they will do. That is not a small thing. That is a wide open door for the tradesman who is ready to walk through it.

The knowledge gap, though, is just as real as the opportunity. Most of us were never taught anything about running a business. Not in school, not in the trades, not anywhere. We were taught to show up, work hard, and do the job right. That is what we know. That is what we are good at. If someone else would handle the marketing, the sales, the estimating, the scheduling, the hiring, the payroll, the bookkeeping, and the hundred other things that go into running a company, most of us could walk in and run the operations side without breaking a sweat. But that is not how it works. You have to wear every hat, at least in the beginning, and most of us are not prepared for that.

Jack is not prepared for it either. Not yet.

What Jack needs — what most tradesmen in his position need — is not more trade skills. He has those. What he needs is a structured way across the GAP. A path that doesn't require him to drop blind into the DEEP and claw his way up the other side alone, bleeding money and time with every mistake. He needs something engineered for exactly where he is and exactly where he wants to go.

He needs a BRIDGE.

Not a motivational speech. Not a generic business book written for someone in a suit in a corner office. A Benchmarked Roadmap of Information, Development, and Growth by Execution — built specifically for the tradesman who is ready to stop being an employee and start being an owner. Step by step. System by system. With the tools already built and the path already mapped.

That is what the BRIDGE is. And that is where Jack's story goes next.

The Bridge

Before we talk about what a bridge does for Jack, let's talk about what a bridge actually is.

A bridge is not a shortcut. It is not a magic solution. A bridge is an engineered, structural solution to a specific problem — the problem of an expanse that cannot be crossed on foot. Every bridge ever built was designed with purpose. The span was measured. The depth was accounted for. The load it would need to carry was calculated. The materials were chosen deliberately. Nothing about a well-built bridge is accidental. It exists because someone understood the problem completely and engineered the answer.

That is exactly what Jack is standing in front of. A gap that cannot be crossed on foot. And what he needs is not courage alone, not hustle alone, not even skill alone. What he needs is a structure that was built for this specific crossing.

BRIDGE (Benchmarked Roadmap Information Development Growth Execution)

A structured, engineered system designed to take a skilled tradesman from maxed-out employee to profitable business owner — step by step, with the tools already built and the path already mapped.

Why Jack Needs a Bridge

Here is something worth thinking about for a moment. Jack did not fail. Jack did exactly what he was taught to do, and he excelled at it.

His parents raised him to work hard and hold down a good job. His teachers pointed him toward a career and told him to be reliable, show up on time, and do what was asked of him. His first foreman taught him the trade and rewarded him for being a good hand. Every single person in Jack's life who had influence over him pointed him in the same direction: be the best employee you can be. And Jack listened. He did everything right by every standard he was ever given.

Jack is in a great place honestly. He let his lifestyle creep up and make his money tight, but if Jack wants to be a top-of-the-ladder employee that's a great decision and an achievement in and of itself. What needs to happen for Jack if he stays here is that he needs to adjust his lifestyle to be in alignment with his income — and Jack can prosper as a maxed out, top rung employee. It's an honest and a great life when prepared for.

However, Jack wants more than that. It's not that the life of a top rung employee isn't enough, Jack honestly just wants a little breathing room in his finances and he would like a little more control over his schedule. He knows this is possible through self employment but nobody ever taught him how to run a business.

The problem is that the skills required to be a great employee and the skills required to run a great business are not the same skills. They overlap in some places, but they are fundamentally different. Jack spent his entire life building one set. He is standing at the edge of a canyon that requires the other. That is not a character flaw. That is just where life brought him. And a bridge — the right bridge — accounts for exactly that.

“Nobody ever taught him how to run a business. That knowledge was never handed to him because the world around him never expected him to need it.”

What the Bridge Does

The first thing a bridge does is keep Jack out of the DEEP.

Without a bridge, the only way across is down. Drop into the DEEP, learn what you can on the way, survive the bottom, and then claw your way up the other side through the CLIMB. That's the road most people take when they go out on their own. It is brutal, it is expensive, and most do not make it. The DEEP is not a myth. It is where many good tradesmen go broke trying to figure out business on their own.

A bridge changes that entirely. Instead of a plunge into the unknown, Jack gets a guided path. Solid ground beneath every step. A structure that was engineered by people who already made the crossing, who know where the gaps are, who know which mistakes are the costly ones, and who built the path specifically so that Jack does not have to learn all of that the hard way.

The second thing a bridge does is give Jack a plan. Not a vague idea of what he should probably do someday. A written plan. What needs to be done, when it needs to be done, and how it is to be done. A Benchmarked Roadmap that removes the guesswork entirely. Jack has never had a roadmap for the business side of life because no one ever gave him one. A bridge gives him exactly that — step by step, milestone by milestone, in the right order, at the right time.

The third thing a bridge does is build Jack up. The same way Value Added Skills made Jack more valuable as a tradesman over time, a bridge adds business

skills layer by layer, at the pace he can absorb them, in the sequence that makes them useful. He is not handed a stack of textbooks and told to figure it out. The knowledge comes to him structured and practical, tied to real tools he can use — pricing systems, contract templates, financial trackers, lead generation frameworks — so that every new skill immediately becomes something he can put to work. He crosses the bridge more capable than when he stepped onto it. That is the point.

And the fourth thing a bridge does is close the GAP. Not partially. Not halfway. The bridge is engineered to span the full distance — from where Jack stands right now, maxed out as an employee, to the other side where his skills as a businessman match his skills as a tradesman. Where he is not just good at the work, but good at running the business that does the work. Where his income is no longer capped by someone else's payroll but rather by his ability as a businessman. Where his time is his own. Where what he builds has value beyond the next paycheck.

The Bridge Is There

Jack is standing at the edge of the canyon. The VAST has stopped him. The GAP is in front of him. The DEEP drops below. And now, for the first time, there is something else in front of him too.

A BRIDGE — a Benchmarked Roadmap of Information, Development & Growth by Execution. Engineered for this exact crossing. Built for someone with exactly his background, his skills, his knowledge gaps, and his aspirations. A structure that accounts for everything he was never taught and gives it to him in a way he can actually use. A path that does not require him to risk everything, figure it all out alone, or survive a brutal climb that breaks most people before they reach the top.

The bridge does not make the decision for him. It does not push him forward. It does not promise that the other side will be easy or that everything will go perfectly. A bridge is a structure, not a guarantee. What it offers is a way across that is safer, smarter, and more achievable than anything Jack could manage on his own.

The other side is real. The opportunity is real. The bridge is real. The only question left is whether Jack — whether you — are going to step onto it.

Who Built This and Why

My name is Delmar Barber. I am the founder of the Entrepreneurial Trades Academy, and before I tell you what that is I want to tell you who I am — because I think it matters, and because you deserve to know whether the person handing you a roadmap has actually walked the road.

I have been in the trades for over 25 years. The majority of that time as a self-employed builder and remodeler. I also spent time with the Union, which I have a great deal of respect for — it made me a better leader and a sharper businessman, and for a lot of tradesmen it is the right path. But the heart of my career has been self-employment, and I have lived just about every version of it. The good years and the brutal ones. The seasons where the work was strong and the money was real, and the seasons where I sat at the kitchen table wondering how I was going to hold it together.

Like most of you, I have lost the tips of my fingers on jobs. I have banged my bones to the point I wondered if I broke them and I have dragged myself to work in conditions that would have sent most people back to bed. I was good at the trade. Really good. And for a long time I thought being good at the trade was enough.

It was not enough.

I remember waking up one morning during one of the hardest stretches of my life — money was tight, really tight — and just sitting with the reality of where I was. I was working constantly. I was good at everything I put my hands on but I was losing. Not because I was lazy, or because I was dishonest and couldn't find work. I just didn't know how to run a business. I knew how to do the work. I did not know how to build the thing around the work.

I was underpricing jobs. Not because I could not calculate a number — I could price a job to the penny and estimate the hours within a fraction — but because I did not know what I did not know. I did not understand margins. I did not understand what it actually cost to run a business, pay myself properly, and still come out ahead.

I was busy. I was working hard. I wasn't losing money but I wasn't making enough and I felt like I was going nowhere. Running like a chicken with its head cut off, spewing my blood, sweat and tears in every direction making a mess out of my business. Just like that chicken's head was detached from its body, my sense of business was detached from reality. Nothing connected, all systems were crashing and the end was inevitable.

So I bought books. Lots and lots of books. I looked for answers the way most people do — hoping someone had already figured it out and written it down. And most of what I found was useless to me. Generic advice written for a general audience by people who had never had drywall dust in their lungs or framed walls in the rain by themselves because it's work or you don't pay your mortgage. Nothing was built for a tradesman. Nothing spoke my language. Nothing addressed what my actual day looked like.

“I built systems because I needed them to survive. I built tools because nothing that existed worked for the way a trade business actually operates.”

So I figured it out the hard way. Through years of costly mistakes, backslidings, lessons that came with a price tag, and eventually — slowly — turning the corner. I built systems because I needed them to survive. I built tools because nothing that existed worked for the way a trade business actually operates. I mapped out the process because I had to find the path on my own and I refused to let that effort go to waste once I found it.

I have made real money in the trades. I have built something worth building that can actually make ends meet and prepares me for my eventual retirement. And I know, without any doubt, that the path I took was longer and harder and more expensive than it needed to be — because nobody built me a bridge.

Why ETA Exists

The Entrepreneurial Trades Academy was not created. It was born. Born out of sheer necessity and survival. Out of 25 years of struggle, sweat and sacrifice.

I do not know a single person who went out on their own and made it big. Not one. That is not a small thing to say out loud. It means that for all the skilled, hardworking tradesmen who take that leap, the overwhelming majority of them struggle in ways they were not prepared for. Not because they lacked the trade skills. Because they lacked everything else — and nobody ever taught them any of it.

ETA exists to change that. Not with theory. Not with generic business advice repackaged for a blue-collar audience. With real systems, real tools, and a real roadmap — built by someone who lived the problem and engineered the solution from the inside out.

At ETA, we encourage tradesmen to begin building their business knowledge before they ever reach their VAST — before the ceiling hits, before the

pressure builds, before the only option left feels like jumping off a cliff. We walk you through the GAP step by step. We give you the BRIDGE. And we build it with you, not just hand it to you and walk away.

The Tools

Every tool we offer at ETA exists because I needed it and it did not exist. I built it to solve a real problem that was costing me real money. Then I refined it, tested it, and I am making it available to every tradesman who is standing where I once stood.

VAST GAP Analysis — FREE

A self-assessment that shows exactly where you stand — how close you are to your threshold, where your knowledge gaps are, and what needs to be addressed before you make a move. I needed something like this when I was trying to figure out what I did not know. Now you have it.

BASE Calculator — FREE

I was pulling money out of my business inconsistently and it was quietly destroying my cash flow. I needed a clear, honest number for what my life actually cost — a reliable monthly figure I could pay myself that covered my family without strangling the business. BASE (Basic Amount Survival Expenses) is that number. The calculator walks you through it and gives you a figure you can actually use.

Entrepreneur Fitness Checklist — FREE

This came from my own honest reckoning with what I was not good at. Business fitness is not about physical condition — it is about being the most qualified person to run your company. The checklist measures you across four dimensions: business acumen, financial discipline, systems and operations, and sales and marketing. It tells you where you are strong and where you have work to do before you put yourself on the line.

All three of these tools are free. No catch. Because the first step to crossing any gap is knowing exactly where you are standing.

Visit entrepreneurialtradesacademy.com to access them.

The Founding 300

In 480 BC, a Persian army estimated at over 100,000 men marched to conquer Greece. Standing in their way at a narrow coastal pass called Thermopylae were 300 Spartan warriors under King Leonidas.

The Spartans did not win by superior numbers. They won the moment — and changed history — because they chose to stand. Because they were trained, disciplined, and willing to hold the line when every rational argument said to retreat. They understood something that most men never learn: that the right 300, standing together in the right place at the right time, can change everything even against insurmountable odds.

ETA is looking for its 300.

Not 300 casual sign-ups. Not 300 people who thought it sounded interesting. Three hundred tradesmen who are done with the ceiling, done with the unpredictable paycheck, done watching the opportunity sit on the other side of a gap they have not yet crossed. Three hundred who are ready to do the work, follow the roadmap, and build something real.

The Founding 300 are the first cohort of the Entrepreneurial Trades Academy. They are the ones who come in before the doors are wide open, who help shape what ETA becomes, who get access that later members will not have at the price they will not see again. Charter access. Lifetime rates. Direct input into what gets built and how.

In return, they hold the line. They do the work for their own business' success. They show up like Spartans — not because it is easy, but because they decided. Because a man who has decided is a different animal than a man who is still thinking about it.

The Spartans at Thermopylae were not remembered because they survived. They were remembered because they chose to stand. The Founding 300 of ETA will be remembered in their own way — by their families, by the businesses they build, by the tradesmen who come after them and find the path a little clearer because someone went first.

There are 300 spots. That is not a marketing number. It is a real limit, because what we are building in this first cohort requires real attention and real engagement — and those things do not scale to infinity. When the Founding 300 are established, ETA will close its doors to new members and the coaching and business aspects of the site will go offline to the public so that we can solely focus on our Spartans.

What Membership Includes

Joining the Founding 300 is not a donation to a cause. It is a direct investment into your business — and what you receive in return is not a course, a PDF, or a promise. It is a set of real business tools that every trade company needs to operate, branded to your company, yours for the lifetime of your business. One time. One price.

\$449.99

ONE TIME. FOR LIFE.

- ✓ **5-Page Professional Website**
- ✓ **Lifetime Hosting — No Monthly Fees**
- ✓ **Top-Tier CRM, Fully Branded to Your Company**
- ✓ **Complete Functionality to Run Your Business**

Every one of those things is something your business needs the day it opens its doors. A professional web presence. A hosting solution that does not bleed you every month. And a CRM — a customer relationship management system — with the full functionality to handle your leads, your pipeline, your communications, your scheduling, and the day-to-day operations of a real trades company, built and branded to look like it belongs to you.

Here is what makes that number remarkable: the CRM alone — just the CRM, without anything else included here — for a single year at the subscription rate that every other tradesman will pay walking in the door is \$1,188. The Founding 300 price is less than half what the CRM costs for one year alone. And it is not for a year. It is for the lifetime of your business.

This is not a discount on a product you do not need yet. These are the tools your business will run on from day one — the website that tells the world you are open, the CRM that keeps your leads organized and your customers from falling through the cracks, and the hosting that keeps all of it online without a monthly bill hanging over your head. At \$449.99, one time, for life, the Founding 300 price is not a deal. It is a decision to invest in your business before most men have the courage to start one.

You have already mastered the craft. You have already done the hard part. The only thing standing between where you are and where you want to be is the knowledge you have not yet been given — and the decision to go get it.

The bridge is built. The Founding 300 are the first ones across.

Are you one of them?

JOIN THE FOUNDING 300
entrepreneurialtradesacademy.com

Delmar Barber

Founder, Entrepreneurial Trades Academy

25 years in the trades. Built from the ground up.