

Chasing FIRE Interview #7 - Erik from The Mastermind Within

Today we continue our [Chasing Fire](#) interview series (click the link to see all interviews in this series). I have always enjoyed reading and listening to interviews to learn how people got to where they are, so as to learn from the successes and failures of others. Each individual's story and path is unique, and we can certainly gain insights from those generous enough to share their stories.

My job as the host is to find interesting people that will inspire and motivate you, as well as myself. I plan to share one high-quality interview per month (maybe even less frequently) and the questions may change over time. I anticipate this to be an iterative process and I would love your feedback in the comments (or via email: dom@genyfinanceguy.com).

If you'd like to be considered for an interview, drop me a note (see email address above) and we can chat about specifics.

You may have noticed from the first two interviews that I'm trying to pull stories from those that are early in their journey ([Zach our very own FIRE Starter](#)) and others that are much further along ([Max a higher earning multi-millionaire](#)). The goal is to alternate every other interview in this fashion (the best that I can).

Today's guest is Erik from [The Mastermind Within](#).

Tell us about yourself: Who are you and what do you do? What is your story? How are you fighting for your Freedom? Where did you start, where in the journey are you, and where do you ultimately want to end up?

Hi! I'm Erik, a 26-year old hustler who is looking to pursue freedom at a young age. During my days, I'm working at a bank as a programmer and statistician, and during my early mornings, nights and weekends, I'm hustling on my blog, podcast, consulting gig, and subscription kit service.

I'm busy, and have learned that this level of work is very difficult. If I was to do it again, I wouldn't take on all this, but focus in on what's most important.

My story starts when I was working as a bookkeeper (around 2012) and was Googling “how can I build wealth” and “how can I become wealthy.” I came across a site called *Financial Samurai* and got hooked to learn more about real estate and investments. At around this same time, I graduated with my Bachelor’s Degree in Math and went straight into a Master’s program in Financial Math.

Working as a bookkeeper during the day and attending class at night, I was able to cash flow the majority of my Master’s and came out with only \$10,000 in student loans after five years of schooling. Because of my Master’s work, I got a job in early 2015 as a risk analyst paying \$63,000 plus bonus and was able to start my path to freedom.

With three years of “doing research” and setting the goal of financial freedom, I was ready to hit the ground running. I paid off my student loan in five months, and took a huge risk by buying a house and house hacking.

Buying a house at 23 is definitely nerve wracking, but for the next three years, I was able to live very cheaply since I had multiple roommates paying me rent. This allowed me to aggressively pay down my mortgage and auto loans, take risks at work, and fund other investments.

I kept reading blogs, and loved *Gen Y Finance Guy*, beginning in 2015. This blog really inspired me to grow my income.

In 2017, I was in a good spot at work, but wanted to really push into the world of side hustling.

This is where I added a bunch of those side hustles I described above. I started my own blog, *The Mastermind Within*, and then started consulting after a former coworker needed help. Later in the year, a friend wanted to start a subscription box business and we got to work on that, too.

I got seriously burnt-out, but with consistent actions, I’ve now grown these hustles into enterprises which at least are off the ground and running.

At the same time, [it’s funny how when you start to hustle on the side, you end up affecting your day job’s work.](#) Through the inspiration from Dom, and also putting in my time and creating efficient solutions for my department, I’ve grown my day job income from \$63,000 to \$101,000 in 3.5 years.

What's my ultimate goal? I don't have a number, but I want to hit financial freedom at a young age. I'm single, but my goal is to also provide for my future family and allow them to experience a freedom beyond the usual life. I'm someone who is incredibly driven to provide for the people I care about around me and will not stop until I get there.

Where in the world are you from?

I live in Minneapolis, Minnesota and have no plans of leaving the upper Midwest. I love the beaches of California, but there's just something about the beauty of the forests and changing of the seasons that I don't think I could ever leave.

What is your routine like? Are you a morning or a night person? What time do you wake up and go to sleep?

I'm all over the board on routine, but definitely have more energy in the morning. Lately, I've been trying to establish a 5:30am wake-up and 10:30pm bed time, and it's been working.

Over the past few years though, it's been a struggle to figure out what's best for me.

What's interesting though, I've never stayed up all night for work or school. I always prioritize getting at least a few hours of sleep, even during busy times.

Ideally, I'd love to get work done in the mornings, and then put the laptop away for the rest of the day after, say, noon. Humans weren't designed to sit still on the computer all day...

How do you earn your living?

My day job is working at a regional bank in a team of statisticians. I've moved around in the department a few times, and now that I've proven I can come up with efficient solutions as a programmer, I'm kind of in a hybrid problem-solving role.

I'm sort of an "intreprenuer" in my current role, and I go around to different people in the team to try to further optimize their code or processes to make their roles more efficient.

With my problem-solving and communication abilities, in the last 3.5 years I've increased my salary from \$63,000 to \$101,000 as I mentioned above.

Do you have any side hustles?

As mentioned above, I have [a bunch of side hustles](#). Some of these are hourly and others are businesses.

House hacking has been my best side hustle and brought in around \$43,000 over the last three years.

My statistical consulting gig pays \$85 an hour and I end up earning about \$2,000 every three months there.

My blog currently makes about \$100 a month and I'm looking at ways to increase this.

The subscription kit business I have has been a loss up to this point, but I'm hopeful the next holiday season can pull me out of the hole. I've invested about \$20,000 in it and haven't gotten anything out.

What percentage of your after-tax income do you save?

I'm saving roughly 50% of my after tax-income. The main expense for me is my house. Now that I'm not house hacking, this is going to decrease to about 35-40% until I figure out what I want to do with my house (either sell or rent).

What is your current net worth?

My spreadsheet says roughly \$175,000 but I'd say my current net worth is somewhere between \$150,000 and \$225,000. This range is due to my house and some other illiquid and volatile assets (my side business for example). Zillow and Redfin have my house at \$60,000 higher than I do... but if I don't sell it doesn't matter. So I don't know what to do with that.

My assets are pretty evenly split between tax advantaged accounts (401k, Roth and HSA), my house equity, and other (business, cash, taxable investments).

When it comes to building wealth, do you spend more time figuring out how to cut expenses or increase income? Why?

I'm a frugal (cheap...) person naturally. Increasing my income has been a goal for the last five years, and [I've been able to do it](#).

There is NO limit to your income, so that's what I focus on. Also, thinking a little bit more philosophically, to increase your income, you have to provide VALUE. How do you provide value? You help people, something I love doing ☐

What is your definition of Financial Freedom? And what is your FREEDOM number(\$)?

Financial freedom is the ability to do what you want, when you want. I don't mind working, but I don't want to be a slave to someone else's schedule or expectations (unless I enjoy that work... there's a lot of caveats here, of course)

I don't have a freedom number and don't plan on having one in the short term. I think the 4% rule is stupid but I really like the thought of cash-flowing assets funding my lifestyle.

I don't know where I'm going to end up, because recently I've been thinking of moving to a lower cost of living area and to do more manual labor to really cut expenses. I'd look to create a life where I don't need much. With this, I wouldn't need much more than \$500,000 saved up.

At the same time, I love pushing my limits and would love [to push for becoming a multimillionaire.](#)

What is the best financial decision you have ever made?

Hands down, buying a house at age 23. It was very risky putting down only about \$10,000 on a \$290,000 house, but it proved to be an amazing experience from a financial and personal perspective.

I learned about being a landlord, paying taxes, and also collecting over \$43,000 in rent over the last 3.5 years. I'd estimate my net worth has grown about \$100,000 from this decision alone (and when you consider some of the compounding to other areas, it's probably even higher).

What are you really good at? What is your "Super Power?"

My consistency and tenacity is something many people have commented that they think is very impressive.

There have been weekends where I spent the whole day on a part of a project...not

because I needed to, but I wanted to, and also because I was loving what I was doing.

When I get in the zone, I'm unstoppable (flow state).

What about you do most people not know?

I can solve a Rubik's Cube in less than 20 seconds and competed in some competitions back when I was in college.

What is the best piece of advice you have ever received?

"Keep your eyes up but your head down." - my Dad, regarding Corporate America.

What this means is get your work done by putting your head down, but keep your eyes up for opportunities to affect more than just your role.

What is the worst financial decision you have ever made?

We will see how this next holiday season turns out. If it's a flop, then it's definitely been my subscription kit service. I've put in about \$20,000 plus countless hours and haven't gotten any return on it.

At the same time, it's essentially been a \$20,000 MBA. Arguably, my experience with legal contracts, marketing, accounting, product development, and operations has been as valuable as getting an actual college MBA!

What's been your biggest surprise, financially or otherwise?

The concept that "ideas are worthless without action" has made a HUGE impact in my life.

Get out of your head and get out in the world. This applies to nearly every area of life: business, relationships, work, exercise, you name it.

Instead of just stewing over an idea forever, I try it and see if it works. I'm still learning how to best go about it, but because of my curiosity and taking action, I know I'm going to learn so much more than just reading or watching how to do it.

Who is your hero?

My dad is certainly a huge inspiration because he has grown his wealth into the millions and also has provided for his family to help facilitate an amazing living and growing situation for his wife and kids.

What does “living life by design” look like to you, in terms of a typical day, week, month, year...? What, if anything, is holding you back from living life by design?

Living life by design is waking up and doing what I want. Digging a little deeper, this means that I want to have a business for myself where I’m taking the risk for the reward. Maybe I’m a little bit scared to try it now, but creating businesses which are sustainable and income producing is the goal financially.

In addition to this, I want to be able to take time off, exercise, be in nature, and spend time volunteering and giving my talents for free.

In the short term, my house is holding me back. It’s a liability and either I need to tap into the equity through a sale, or I need to rent it out and figure out how to raise the appropriate amount of cash to give me more flexibility in the near term.

In the longer term, it’s the uncertainty around my future family situation. I grew up with four sisters, and want a family for myself. If I have a few kids, I will have to figure out a different financial situation...

What book do you most frequently recommend? Why?

[The Slight Edge](#)^x, which is your favorite book as well ☐

The principles are so simple yet important. Put in the work consistently and you can achieve whatever you want. Simple daily disciplines WILL result in success.

Humans underestimate how much they can accomplish in a year, but overestimate what they can accomplish in a day. Everyone on this Earth has 24 hours in a day, 168 hours in a week, 720 hours in a month, and 8,760 hours in a year.

What’s your idea? What’s your goal? Where do you want to be in a year? What about three years? Five years?

Think about this for a second: in five years, you’ll have been on this Earth for 43,800 hours. What will you do with them?

How many hours do you think you'll need to reach your goals? 100? 1000? Let's say it's going to take 100 focused hours to align your current actions with what you want your life to look like.

Spending five hours today, and then not picking it up again for two months isn't going to propel you towards your goal.

But spend an hour a day over the next 100 days and you'll reach your goal. Spend even *half* an hour every day for the next 200 days, and you'll still be a lot closer to where you want to be.

Where can we find you online?

I write three times a week at [The Mastermind Within](#), and publish a weekly episode with my co-host Steph at [Simple Minded Millennial](#). Feel free to contact me at themastermindwithin@gmail.com with any questions or comments!



Gen Y Finance Guy

Hey, I'm Dom - the man behind the cartoon. You'll notice that I sign off as "Gen Y Finance Guy" on all my posts, due to the fact that I write this blog anonymously (at least for now). I like to think of myself as the *Chief Freedom Officer* here of my little corner of the internet. In the real world, I'm a 30-something former C-Suite executive turned entrepreneur turned capital allocator. I am trying to humanize finance by sharing my own journey to Financial Freedom. I believe in total *honesty* and *transparency*. That is why before I ever started blogging, I decided that I would share all of my own [financial stats](#). I do this not to brag, but instead to inspire motivate, and also to hold myself accountable. My goal is to be a beacon of hope, motivation, and inspiration for *you*, the reader, by living life by example and sharing it **all** here on the blog. My sincere hope is that you will be able to learn from me - both from my successes and my failures! [Read More](#)

