

The Indie Hacker's Weekly Operating System

A Comprehensive Guide

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CHAPTER 1

Why Most Solo Founders Spin Their Wheels

You shipped something. Maybe it got a few upvotes on Product Hunt, a handful of sign-ups, and then... silence. So you build the next thing. Same result. Six months later you have five half-finished projects, a backlog that induces anxiety, and a sneaking suspicion that 'building in public' is just a coping mechanism for not having a real strategy.

The problem isn't your ideas. It's your operating cadence.

Most indie hackers work reactively -- they build what feels exciting today, tweet about it, check metrics obsessively, and pivot the moment traction is slow. What they lack is a repeatable weekly structure that forces the right questions at the right time: What's the one thing that moves the needle this week? Am I spending time on acquisition or just product? Is this project still worth continuing?

The Indie Hacker's Weekly Operating System (IH-OS) is a battle-tested framework for running your solo business with the intentionality of a funded team -- but with the flexibility a single person actually needs. It takes about 90 minutes a week to run properly, and it will change the shape of your output within a month.

This guide walks you through the full system: the Sunday planning ritual, the daily standup, the Friday review, the metrics dashboard you actually need, and the decision frameworks that keep you from chasing shiny objects.

CHAPTER 2

The Architecture of the Weekly OS

The IH-OS runs on three interlocking loops:

1. THE WEEKLY LOOP (Sunday + Friday, ~90 min total)

This is the backbone. Every Sunday you set a single Weekly Win -- the one outcome that, if achieved, makes the week a success. Every Friday you review whether you hit it and why or why not. The discipline of naming one thing forces prioritization in a way that long to-do lists never do.

2. THE DAILY LOOP (Mon-Fri, 15 min)

A lightweight standup you run with yourself. Three questions, written down, no exceptions: What did I ship or move forward yesterday? What is the single most important task today? What's blocking me? The act of writing (not just thinking) these answers externalizes your planning brain and keeps you honest.

3. THE MONTHLY LOOP (Last Friday of the month, 45 min)

A deeper review that operates at the portfolio level. You look across all active projects, score them on a simple Traction / Excitement / Effort matrix, and make a binary decision for each: Double down, Maintain, or Sunset. This is the meeting where projects get killed -- and killing bad projects is the highest-leverage move most solo founders never make.

These three loops are not optional extras. They are the OS. Everything else -- the templates, the metrics dashboard, the decision frameworks -- exists to make these loops run smoothly.

CHAPTER 3

The Sunday Planning Ritual (45 Minutes)

Block Sunday evenings from 7-8pm (or whatever consistent time works for you). This is non-negotiable. Treat it like a board meeting with yourself.

STEP 1 - BRAIN DUMP (10 min)

Open a blank doc. Write every task, worry, idea, and commitment rattling around in your head. Don't organize yet -- just empty. Studies on cognitive load show that unwritten tasks consume working memory even when you're not consciously thinking about them. Getting them out of your head and onto paper is the first act of the system.

STEP 2 - TRIAGE (10 min)

Go through your brain dump and tag each item: [P] = Project work, [A] = Acquisition/marketing, [O] = Operations/admin, [L] = Learning. Count them. If [A] items are under 30% of your list, you are over-indexed on building. This is the most common mistake: indie hackers spend 90% of their time on product and then wonder why they have no customers.

STEP 3 - SET THE WEEKLY WIN (5 min)

Write one sentence: 'This week is a success if ____.' The blank must be a specific, observable outcome -- not 'work on marketing' but 'publish two cold outreach emails and schedule three user interviews.' Not 'improve the dashboard' but 'ship the CSV export feature.' Vague wins cannot be evaluated on Friday.

STEP 4 - BLOCK YOUR CALENDAR (10 min)

Put your three to five most important tasks onto specific calendar slots. Not a to-do list -- actual time blocks. Research on planning fallacy shows that tasks without time slots almost never get done. Defend your Deep Work blocks (90-min, no Slack, no Twitter) like they're investor calls.

STEP 5 - IDENTIFY ONE ACQUISITION ACTION (5 min)

Every single week, without exception, you must do one thing to bring new potential customers into your world. Write it down separately. Ideas: cold email a potential user for a 20-min call, post a genuine behind-the-scenes thread, submit to a relevant directory, reach out to a complementary product for a partnership, write one SEO-targeted article. One action. Mandatory.

STEP 6 - CLOSE THE LOOP (5 min)

Review last week's Weekly Win. Did you hit it? Write two sentences: what happened, and what you'd do

differently. These retrospective notes become extraordinarily valuable at month-end and when you need to diagnose patterns in your own work.

CHAPTER 4

The Daily Standup (15 Minutes Every Morning)

This ritual takes 15 minutes and should happen before you open email, Twitter, or Slack. Its purpose is to start each day with intention rather than reaction.

THE THREE QUESTIONS:

Q1: What did I ship, move forward, or complete yesterday?

Write it out. Be honest. 'Spent three hours on Twitter' counts as the answer if that's the truth. This question creates accountability even when no one else is watching. Over time, your daily standup log becomes a record of actual output versus perceived output -- and the gap is often humbling.

Q2: What is my ONE Thing today?

If you could only accomplish one thing today and still call it a productive day, what would it be? This task gets the first Deep Work block of your morning. It does not move to tomorrow. It is the thing you'll feel worst about not doing.

Q3: What is blocking me, and what's my plan around it?

Blocks come in three flavors: technical (I don't know how to do X), motivational (I'm avoiding Y because it feels scary), and external (waiting on Z from someone else). Naming the block -- and writing a concrete next action to unblock -- converts vague anxiety into a solvable problem.

FORMAT: Keep your standup in a running daily log file or Notion page. Date each entry. After 30 days, read them back. You will learn more about your own working patterns from this log than from any productivity book.

ONE MORE RULE: If you open a task and work on it for more than 25 minutes before your standup, you've already lost the ritual. The standup is a planning tool, not a task itself. Do it first.

CHAPTER 5

The Friday Review (45 Minutes)

Friday afternoon, after you've stopped building for the week. Pour a coffee. This is your weekly board meeting.

PART 1 - DID YOU HIT THE WEEKLY WIN? (10 min)

Pull out the Weekly Win you set on Sunday. Score it: Hit / Partial / Missed. Write one paragraph explaining why. Be ruthlessly honest. The common failure modes:

- You set a vague win and are now rationalizing that you 'sort of' hit it -> next week, set a measurable win.
- You got distracted by a new idea mid-week -> note this as a pattern; it's your most expensive habit.
- External events genuinely interrupted -> fine, but record what they were.

PART 2 - METRICS CHECK (10 min)

Pull up your five core metrics (see the Metrics Dashboard section). Write the numbers down. Don't analyze yet -- just record. The goal is a weekly time-series you can look back on in three months and actually see what worked.

PART 3 - ACQUISITION REVIEW (10 min)

Did you execute your mandatory acquisition action? What was the result? Add any new leads, users, or conversations to your simple CRM (even a spreadsheet). If you skipped the acquisition action two weeks in a row, that is a red flag -- add it to your Sunday planning slot as a calendar block.

PART 4 - ENERGY AUDIT (5 min)

Rate your week from 1-5 on two dimensions: Output (did you accomplish things?) and Energy (did the work feel alive or draining?). High Output + low Energy means you're building something you don't care about. High Energy + low Output means you enjoy the work but need tighter focus. This two-number signal is one of the most useful things in the system.

PART 5 - SET UP SUNDAY (10 min)

Write a brief note for Sunday-you: what's the most important thing next week, what's lingering, and what do you need to decide? This is not the full Sunday planning ritual -- just a handoff note so you don't start Sunday from scratch.

CHAPTER 6

The Metrics Dashboard You Actually Need

Most indie hackers either track nothing or track everything. Both are wrong. Here are the five metrics that matter for an early-stage indie product -- no more, no less.

METRIC 1 - WEEKLY ACTIVE USERS (or weekly active customers)

Definition: Unique users who took a meaningful action in your product in the last 7 days. Why it matters: It's the truest signal of whether people are getting value. Vanity metrics (sign-ups, page views) can be gamed; WAU is harder to fake. Target: growing week-over-week.

METRIC 2 - MRR (Monthly Recurring Revenue)

If you have paid users, track MRR weekly. Break it into New MRR, Expansion MRR, and Churned MRR. Even if your number is \$47, tracking the components forces you to think about retention and upsell, not just acquisition. If you're pre-revenue, track 'pipeline MRR' -- the sum of MRR you would have if all current conversations converted.

METRIC 3 - WEEKLY ACQUISITION ACTIONS COMPLETED

How many acquisition actions did you actually complete this week? Target: minimum 1, ideally 3-5. This is a leading indicator -- acquisition actions today turn into users in 2-8 weeks. If this number is consistently zero, your MRR will flatline no matter how good your product is.

METRIC 4 - QUALITATIVE SIGNAL COUNT

How many real conversations with users or potential users did you have this week? Emails, calls, DMs -- any genuine two-way exchange counts. Target: at least one per week. The information density in one 20-minute user call exceeds months of metric-watching.

METRIC 5 - BUILD VELOCITY

How many meaningful features, fixes, or content pieces did you ship? Not 'worked on' -- shipped, as in live and usable. This keeps you honest about the gap between activity and output.

SPREADSHEET SETUP:

Track these in a simple Google Sheet with one row per week. Columns: Date | WAU | MRR | Acquisition Actions | Conversations | Shipped Items | Notes. After eight weeks you'll have enough data to see real trends. After sixteen weeks, you'll make better decisions than almost any early-stage founder you know.

CHAPTER 7

The Monthly Portfolio Review

On the last Friday of every month, extend your weekly review to a full portfolio review. This is where the hardest, highest-leverage decisions get made.

STEP 1 - LIST ALL ACTIVE PROJECTS

Write every project you're actively spending time on. Include side experiments, maintenance projects, and anything you think about but haven't officially started.

STEP 2 - SCORE EACH PROJECT ON THREE DIMENSIONS

For each project, give a score of 1-5 on:

- TRACTION: Is there evidence this resonates? (Users, revenue, organic inbound, unsolicited praise)
- EXCITEMENT: Does working on this energize you?
- EFFORT: How much of your weekly time does this consume? (1 = almost none, 5 = majority)

STEP 3 - APPLY THE DECISION MATRIX

For each project, make one of three calls:

DOUBLE DOWN: High traction OR high excitement + manageable effort. This project gets more of your time next month. Identify one big bet you're making on it.

MAINTAIN: Moderate traction, moderate effort. Keep the lights on, don't invest more, but don't kill it yet. Set a specific 60-day trigger: 'If MRR doesn't reach \$X by [date], I sunset this.'

SUNSET: Low traction, high effort, or low excitement. Kill it. Write an honest post-mortem (even a private one). The goal is to learn what signal you ignored when you started it. Then archive and move on. Most indie hackers have 2-3 projects that should be sunsetted right now.

STEP 4 - SET ONE BIG MONTHLY BET

For your Double Down project, set one ambitious goal for the month. Not a safe goal -- a goal that would require something to go unusually well. This is the difference between indie hackers who grow and those who plateau.

STEP 5 - PERSONAL REVIEW

Are you taking care of yourself? Rate your month on sleep, exercise, and social connection -- the three factors most correlated with sustained creative output. A score of 1 in any category is a warning sign that the

business will suffer within 30 days.

CHAPTER 8

Decision Frameworks for Common Crossroads

These are the inflection points where most solo founders lose months. Here's how to think through each one quickly and move on.

FRAMEWORK 1 - SHOULD I PIVOT OR PERSIST?

Apply the '90-Day Evidence Test': Do you have at least 90 days of genuine go-to-market effort (not building -- actual outreach and marketing) with measurable, specific results? If no, you don't have enough signal to pivot -- you have an acquisition problem, not a product problem. If yes, look at engagement quality: are users churning because the product is wrong, or because the wrong users found it? Pivot the positioning before you pivot the product.

FRAMEWORK 2 - SHOULD I BUILD THIS FEATURE?

Run the '3-Source Rule': Has at least three independent users requested this specific feature, unprompted, in their own words? If yes, ship it. If no, it's a hypothesis -- build the lightest possible version that tests the assumption. Most indie hacker feature work falls into the 'no one asked for this' category and consumes weeks.

FRAMEWORK 3 - SHOULD I START A NEW PROJECT?

The 'Completion Debt' check: Do you have an existing project with traction but incomplete core functionality? If yes, starting something new adds to your completion debt -- the accumulated drag of half-built things. New projects feel exciting because they have no baggage yet. That feeling is a trap. New projects are only justified when: (a) your main project is genuinely finished and stalled, or (b) the new project shares users naturally.

FRAMEWORK 4 - SHOULD I CHARGE MORE?

If fewer than 30% of people who see your pricing say it's 'a bit expensive,' your price is too low. Price resistance is a signal you're undervaluing your product. Double your price, add a money-back guarantee, and A/B test for 30 days. Going from \$9/mo to \$19/mo with zero churn is a free 2x revenue event.

FRAMEWORK 5 - WHEN SHOULD I QUIT MY DAY JOB?

Not when you're excited -- when you have evidence. The threshold that works: MRR \geq 50% of monthly expenses for three consecutive months, with a growth trend suggesting 100% coverage within six months. Quitting earlier is a bet, not a plan.

CHAPTER 9

Anti-Patterns: Eight Habits That Kill Solo Founders

Recognizing failure modes is half the work. Here are the eight most common patterns that derail indie hackers -- and the specific fix for each.

1. BUILDING IN PUBLIC AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR BUILDING

Symptom: 2+ hours/day on Twitter documenting your journey but nothing shipped in two weeks. Fix: Track it as an [A] activity, cap it at 30 minutes/day until you have traction.

2. PERPETUAL BETA SYNDROME

Symptom: Your product has been 'almost ready to charge' for four months. Fix: Set a hard launch date -- two weeks from today. Ship what you have. Charge from day one. You will learn more from one paying customer than from six months of free users.

3. THE METRIC REFRESH LOOP

Symptom: You check your analytics 15+ times a day. Fix: Check metrics once a day, at a fixed time. Real traction does not require constant monitoring. Constant monitoring is anxiety, not strategy.

4. SOLUTION LOOKING FOR A PROBLEM

Symptom: You built a tool that solves your problem but never validated whether anyone else has it. Fix: Before building, have five conversations with people outside your friend group in the target audience. 'I'm sure people would want this' is not validation.

5. SHINY OBJECT SYNDROME

Symptom: Every week brings a new 'this is the one' project. Fix: The Monthly Portfolio Review is your circuit breaker. Write new ideas in a 'Future Projects' doc and return at month-end.

6. UNDERINVESTING IN DISTRIBUTION

Symptom: Great product, no audience. Fix: The mandatory weekly acquisition action. No exceptions. Audience compounds; product quality above 'good enough' does not.

7. IGNORING CHURN

Symptom: You celebrate new sign-ups but never ask why users cancel. Fix: Add a one-question cancellation survey: 'What was the main reason you stopped?' Read every response. Churn is your product roadmap

speaking to you.

8. LONE WOLF ISOLATION

Symptom: You haven't talked to another founder in a month. Fix: Join one community and commit to one real conversation per week. Isolation degrades decision quality. Other founders will spot your blind spots in ten minutes.

CHAPTER 10

Your 90-Day Launch Sequence

If you're starting a new project from scratch or restarting a stalled one, here is the exact sequence to follow using the Weekly OS.

DAYS 1-14: VALIDATE BEFORE YOU BUILD

- Week 1: Identify 20 potential users. Have five conversations. Ask about the problem, not your solution.
- Week 2: Build the simplest possible 'Wizard of Oz' version -- fake the hard parts manually. Get two people to use it and pay for it (even \$5). If you can't get two people to pay \$5, you don't have a product yet.

DAYS 15-45: BUILD THE MINIMUM SELLABLE PRODUCT

- Not Minimum Viable Product -- Minimum Sellable Product. An MVP can be rough; an MSP must be good enough that you're not embarrassed to charge for it.
- Weekly Win each week: one specific feature that a paying user asked for.
- Mandatory acquisition action: reach out to five new potential users per week.

DAYS 46-60: CHARGE FROM DAY ONE

- Set up payments before you launch publicly. Even if it's a Stripe link in a Notion page.
- Tell everyone from your validation conversations: 'It's live. I'd love you to be my first paid customer.'
- Target: 3-5 paying customers before any public launch.

DAYS 61-90: FIND YOUR ACQUISITION CHANNEL

- Test three channels: cold outreach, content (SEO or social), and one community (niche forum, subreddit, Slack group).
- Track which produces the best MRR/effort ratio.
- By day 90, double down on the one channel with evidence and deprioritize the others.

THE 90-DAY MILESTONE:

By day 90 you should have: paying customers, one validated acquisition channel, and a clear answer to 'does this project have a future?' That's more progress than most indie hackers make in a year.

Weekly OS Quick-Reference Checklist

- SUNDAY PLANNING (45 min): Brain dump everything rattling in your head
- SUNDAY PLANNING: Triage tasks -- [P]roject, [A]cquisition, [O]ps, [L]earning
- SUNDAY PLANNING: Set ONE Weekly Win (specific, observable, evaluable)
- SUNDAY PLANNING: Block time for top 3-5 tasks on actual calendar
- SUNDAY PLANNING: Identify one mandatory acquisition action for the week
- SUNDAY PLANNING: Review last week's Weekly Win -- did you hit it? Why?
- DAILY STANDUP (15 min, before email/social): What did I ship yesterday?
- DAILY STANDUP: What is my ONE Thing today? (gets first Deep Work block)
- DAILY STANDUP: What is blocking me, and what's my plan around it?
- FRIDAY REVIEW (45 min): Score Weekly Win -- Hit / Partial / Missed
- FRIDAY REVIEW: Record your 5 core metrics (WAU, MRR, Acq. Actions, Convos, Shipped)
- FRIDAY REVIEW: Did you execute the mandatory acquisition action?
- FRIDAY REVIEW: Rate the week -- Output (1-5) and Energy (1-5)
- FRIDAY REVIEW: Write handoff note for Sunday-you
- MONTHLY REVIEW (last Friday, 45 min): List all active projects
- MONTHLY REVIEW: Score each project on Traction, Excitement, and Effort (1-5)
- MONTHLY REVIEW: Make a binary call for each -- Double Down, Maintain, or Sunset
- MONTHLY REVIEW: Set one Big Monthly Bet for your Double Down project
- MONTHLY REVIEW: Personal health check -- sleep, exercise, social connection (1-5)