

Alvin Hall talks to Footprint about how he set up his own business and offers wise advice for young entrepreneurs

# Alvin Hall: My life as a reluctant entrepreneur

**A** RELUCTANT entrepreneur – that's how I often describe how I came to run my own financial services training business.

I was essentially forced into this position when I realised I had no other choice. In early 1990 - January 9 to be precise - I was made redundant from a job I loved and was good at.

I lost my job largely because I was a creative, right-brain type among a group of managers who were mostly overly rational types who couldn't imagine that a person like me would have any of the left-brain qualities they prized.

After taking a few weeks off to absorb the blow to my ego, I began looking for a new job.

I had an attractive, strong resume and got lots of interviews - well over 20 - but I did not get a single job offer. I'll never forget the headhunter's explanation.

"Alvin, people really like you and are impressed by what you've done. But the fact that you do so many things well makes them nervous and makes you seem restless or unfocused. Remember, these potential employers don't want all of you, they only want the part of you that will do the job they have well."

Her words went counter to everything I had been taught about facing an interview. But

## The lessons I wish I'd known when I started

they made me think for the first time about working for myself.

If these companies did not want all of me to work for them full-time, maybe they would be willing to hire part of me as a consultant.

I visited one of the interviewers I'd had a great rapport with and pitched the idea to her. She liked it and even proposed a consulting assignment that I could begin shortly.

Walking home I decided that my future success, security and joy would come from working for myself.

Within a few weeks I had filed all of the papers to incorporate my new financial services training company. I was ready

to embrace my new identity as an entrepreneur.

But I had a lot to learn about running a business and managing myself - and I had to learn it quickly.

I look back on those early days as a "crash course" - in all senses of the word "crash". I learned a lot from my mistakes as well as from the wisdom and insights my entrepreneurial friends shared with me.

Today, looking back from the perspective of many years of successful self-employment - and continued learning from the challenges I continue to grapple with - I can identify five key lessons I wish I'd known when I first 'hung out my shi-

ngle', as we say in the States, or 'set about building a client base', as you would say in the UK.

**1. You'll work much harder as an entrepreneur than you ever did as an employee.**

When budding entrepreneurs talk to me about the more relaxed pace and the freedom they expect to enjoy when working for themselves, I know their enterprise is doomed to stumble or fail.

Especially in the early stages of building a business, entrepreneurship is an all-engrossing challenge.

Unless you start out with

generous funding, you'll be doing everything - creating your company's products or services, marketing them, managing clients, sending out bills and (hopefully!) collecting payment, balancing the books, and working to expand the business by bringing in new clients.

As an employee you probably wore one hat; as an entrepreneur you'll wear many hats. Many years from now when the company's success is self-sustaining then you'll be able to take time off, but this is highly unlikely to happen in the first two to five years.

**2. Like it or not, your clients**

**will control your schedule.**

Yes, you got rid of your boss by becoming an entrepreneur, but you'll quickly discover that you've merely replaced him with many bosses.

Without clients you won't have a business. And if you don't respond to your clients' or customers' needs and requests - reasonable or unreasonable - in a way that makes them happy, they'll find someone else who will.

Everyone is replaceable despite what we would like to think about the uniqueness of our skills, services or products.

So it's up to you to make every client feel special, cared



**□ You'll work much harder as an entrepreneur than ever you did as an employee...**



## Having a Party!

Birthdays | Weddings | Anniversaries  
Christenings & Celebrations All Parties catered for!

(Subject to availability, Terms & Conditions apply)

**FREE FUNCTION ROOMS  
CATERING or SELF-CATER**

call for bookings 01244 830332

Email: [info@dayshotelchesternorth.co.uk](mailto:info@dayshotelchesternorth.co.uk)

Web: [www.dayshotelchesternorth.co.uk](http://www.dayshotelchesternorth.co.uk)





# 'I love discovering through experience the good results that my creativity, discipline and determination can yield'

about, and listened to. Dedicate yourself to achieving this and soon your clients will feel they have a personal stake in helping you to be successful - which means they'll start bringing or referring more business to you.

### 3. You'll need to diversify your client base as quickly as possible.

If you're lucky you may start your self-employment career with one or two clients gained through previous connections or friendships.

But being too dependent on only a few clients can be dangerous for your business's survival.

Particularly when you are selling your services to another business, lots of things can happen to eliminate a big customer overnight:

Management may change, a restructuring may reduce the need for your services, the firm may be acquired, or the client's finances may go south.

It happened to me on September 15, 2008, when Lehman Brothers, a major client of mine, declared bankruptcy. In one moment, all of the money owed me, all of the anticipated annual revenues, and all of the good working relationships I'd built up over the years disappeared.

And given that the entire financial services sector had been hit - and hit hard - by the ongoing market crisis, I knew it was highly unlikely that I would be able to replace those revenues any time soon.

The moral: Never take a client or the revenue it generates for granted. Remember this adage: Wealth is built through concentration, but maintained through diversification. It's as true for entrepreneurs as it is for investors.

### 4. You'll need a cash umbrella-because eventually everybody gets caught in a storm.

When your business, thanks to a lot of hard work and a little bit of good luck, finally begins to generate serious money, don't go on a spending spree thinking that the pounds will just keep on rolling in forever.

Every business goes through slow periods due to the ups and downs of the business cycle or unexpected events beyond anyone's control - a natural disaster, a personal tragedy like a serious illness, or an economic calamity.

At such moments you need to be able to

think calmly and consider your options without feeling desperate. Having cash in the bank gives you the breathing room you'll need to take the necessary steps to survive the hard times and stay around to benefit from the good ones.

As an entrepreneur you have to create your own sustainability - and that means devoting any extra cash to building a savings account that will help you stay afloat when the inevitable trouble strikes.

### 5. You need to face your strengths and your weaknesses with absolute honesty.

Entrepreneurs are not usually people with retiring personalities or small egos and when a new business meets with initial success it's easy for the acclaim and admiration to go to one's head.

As a result some entrepreneurs get to feeling as if they can do anything. Such hubris can destroy not only your business but also your professional and personal relationships.

Wise entrepreneurs know their weaknesses, hire people to handle things they are not good at, and let them do their jobs.

This doesn't mean abdicating the responsibility to review their work regularly. Having blind faith in an accountant or attorney, for example, may be an invitation to fraud.

But it does mean working with top-notch professionals who can complement your strengths and relying on their good judgement in their areas of unique expertise.

These five wish-I'd-known-that-sooner lessons may make entrepreneurship sound fraught with peril. And it's true that, like any truly worthwhile experience, entrepreneurship can be challenging, even risky.

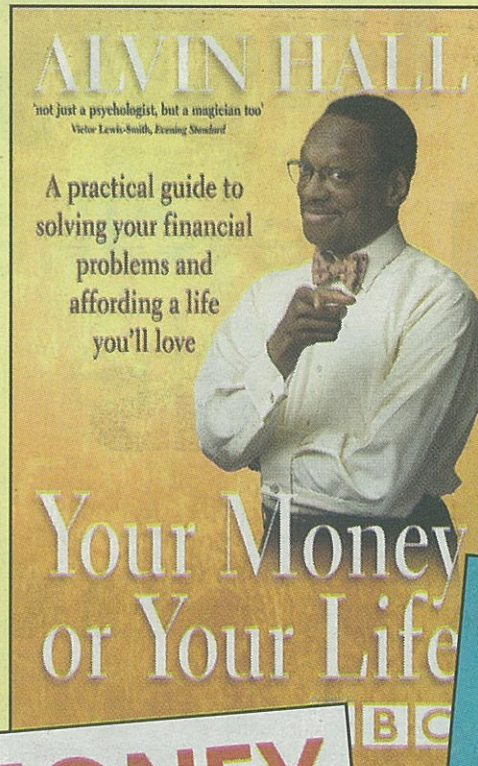
But I've also discovered that I absolutely love being the master of my business destiny.

I love discovering through experience the good results that my creativity, discipline, and determination can yield.

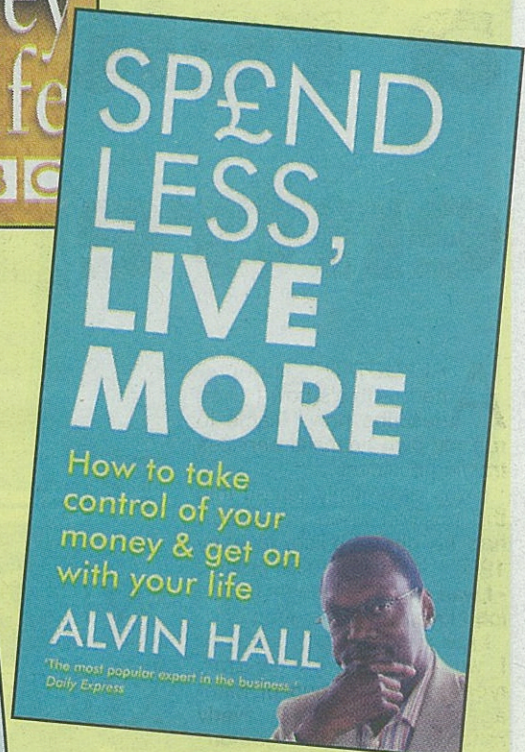
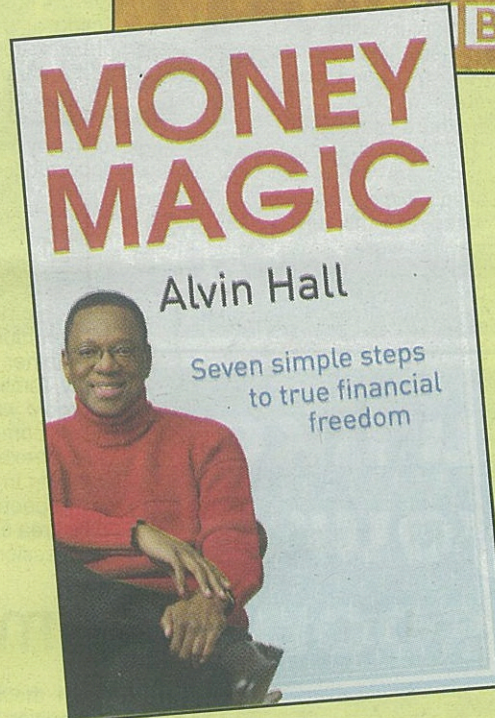
I love being free to try different things - some of which are successful, some not.

Most of all I love knowing that, for better and for worse, I had the courage to grab an opportunity - albeit reluctantly - and have managed to make it work successfully for over two decades.

If the entrepreneurial path is the right one for you, I hope you can achieve the same kind of success-and more!



# Three of the best



ALVIN HALL is an American financial expert who is well known in the UK from his TV series, his radio series and his writings.

If he has one mission in life, it is surely to remove the mystique and hype from the world of finance and thus help people of all ages and all incomes to make their money work for them. Alvin's books are based on an understanding of the real problems that people face and he provides straightforward guidance on how to overcome them. Three of his most recent books are:

**Money Magic: Seven Simple Steps to True Financial Freedom (Quick Reads) RRP £1.99**  
If you worry about bills, find it difficult to save and hard to budget when you don't have much money, then this book will take you through Alvin's seven steps to success and put you on

the road to financial freedom, whatever your current situation.

**Your Money or Your Life (with Karl Weber) RRP £9.29**  
A practical guide to managing and improving your financial life.

**Spend Less, Live More: How to Take Control of Your Money and Get on with Your Life RRP £7.99**  
This fully updated edition of the hugely successful What Not To Spend provides the ultimate guide to managing your money - from budgeting, saving and clearing debt, to investing and planning for the future. It includes sections on how to save when things are tight, and how to deal with redundancy.

## You'll need a cash umbrella - because eventually everybody gets caught in a storm...

We are now Peugeot approved



### ACCIDENT AND COSMETIC CAR REPAIR CENTRE

# Body Perfect



• Bumper Repairs • Scratch Repairs  
• Alloy Wheel Repairs •

**For all your company vehicle needs call us today.**

Further discounts for company fleets available\* \*Subject to terms and conditions

**Units 5 & 6, Rhosddu Industrial Estate, Wrexham 01978 313900**