

#nationalstorytellingweek



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Who are YOU and What do you do?

Mike Foster. My personal brand and now one of my businesses is The Entrepreneurs Mentor.

Born, raised, and educated in Kidlington, Oxfordshire. I left school to 'get to work' and earn money, inspired by the hard work of my parents. I started at Barclays Bank just before my 16th birthday and quickly moved into their Small Business team.

I have lived and worked in Oxfordshire all my life, except for 9 months in the city, so I know a few people in the local business community! I have explored the UK, mostly in 2000/01 whilst I was the National Chairman for GB&I of Rotaract, part of Rotary International, when most weekends I was in a different part of the country speaking at an event.

My personal objective was to build my skills, knowledge, and experience, so that I could chair a board meeting without the wool being pulled over my eyes by any reporting member. I have seen this so many times for others. This goal has created the breadth of knowledge that I have and results in my ability to offer an holistic view of a business.

For over 30 years, in some way I have been supporting business owners in the work that I do or with my networking groups. For the last 8 years, I have been Mentoring other business owners and since March 2020 within the control of my own business. I seriously love every minute.

I am a people person, a collaborator, an engaging leader, love planning and setting myself goals. I am self-motivated and inspired by so many. I like good food at a good restaurant and a beer or gin with friends.

WHO DO YOU HELP and what problems of theirs do you solve?

I work with business owners who want to start, develop, scale, or grow their own business. My clients are from across several sectors, as I do not work with competing business to avoid any conflict of interest. They range in size from a start up to a £3m turnover business with over 30 employees.

Many of my clients utilise my breadth of experience and skills to use me as a sounding board. For many the running of a business is a lonely place and I provide an additional pair of ears and eyes. Our work together also considers the business model and plan, breaking it down for laser focus. I then support my clients by keeping them motivated and accountable for the execution.

Most business owners that I speak to want support to help them better use their time, gain control, have better choices, and find the business model that their hard work deserves.

WHY DID YOU START your business and where?

Since heading the Start Up team for Barclays, Oxfordshire in the late 90's, 'start up' has been in my blood. For my first actual involvement with a start up business, I had a fantastic opportunity to join representatives breaking away from South Oxfordshire District Council to start up SOLL Leisure. Thereafter, I started my own businesses.

Each of my own six businesses have been best considered whilst on holiday, but the first business was from a coffee with someone in my trusted network. Rodger French, who as an early supporter and someone who motivated me to make the step change I really wanted. A1 Group was born in 2001 and the business still trades successfully today 8 years after I sold it.

My current business, The Entrepreneurs Mentor, was started because I was hearing the same feedback about coaching that I had experienced. It was frustrating for me to be continually asked "What do you think?" or "How would you do it?". I remember my sales coach when I was seeking support for building lead funnels. I had engaged their support to learn how to do it, which obviously I did not know the how or I may not have been in the room! As I started to explore this, and found many business owners felt the same, my research also highlighted that many business owners were procrastinating due to the conflicting advice that they were receiving. I felt my holistic approach and broad experience, together with my collaborative way of working with other professionals, would be helpful for other entrepreneurs. As a Mentor, I will coach my clients, but if required I will share a case study, tool, or proven example to spark or fuel their considerations.

WHAT GETS YOU out of bed in the morning and why?

I've never been one to want to stay in bed. I'm always waiting to get up, get on and often to schedule those things that I wrote down during the night into my priority list.

I have personal goals and the activity required to achieve these goals gets me up, whether that is for my family, my health, my wealth, or my clients.

My motivation, my purpose: I know it sounds cliché but I just love helping others. I am also inspired by the great things that my clients are doing and the support of my network.

My personality type also likes variety, hence at one point I had four of my own businesses in operation at the same time. Each day is exciting as I meet a different client, from a different business type, with a different challenge and different goals.

Another reason is why I have run the Oxford Business Community Network for nearly 12 years, as I just have a deep desire to support people in any way that I can.

Innovation and Creativity drives my desire to get up, do something different today and stand out from the crowd. I am not a follower; I am a creator of ideas and grateful for the support I receive.

WHAT HAVE BEEN your greatest highs, lows and learnings?

Without doubt my greatest high was the birth of my children, although I did go to a networking event on the evening of the day my second, Max, was born! Well, I was the host and could not let my members down!!

Other highs relating to business include:

- The proud feeling of successfully launching and developing six of my own businesses, franchising one and selling two, whilst employing 23 colleagues at the peak. All six I am pleased to have owned for over that often missed 5-year anniversary.
- The emotion of the engagement by businesses that I have experienced since relaunching my own business last year.
- Twice being asked to speak at conferences for 2,000 & 5,000 people.
- The 'genuine' and 'supportive' community we have all built together at the Oxford Business Community Network.
- People entrusting me to represent or lead their brand, albeit a client, charity, event, or organisation.
- Celebrating my client's success with them. There is no better feeling.
- That feeling when a client extends their agreement with you because you've delivered your promise, value and exceeded their expectations.
- Helping a client to sell their business for 3x the valuation in a declining market sector.

The most recent high is being entrusted as a co-host of THE 'original' Business Brunch on Get Radio with Ben.

My lows and learnings are related. I am hugely trusting and sometimes too much so. My lows have been when I have been let down by people, trusted their words or promise but found it to be empty. It is something I still learn today within the business community, but my outcomes are experiences that for sure I have learnt from!

From my experience be careful who you trust, as being 'nice to you' does not always mean they are really being 'nice to you'!

The relationship of doing business with people and collaborating is not too dissimilar to a personal relationship of love and trust. When they break down, they hurt unless you are glad to get out! I hate being used.

Certainly, one lowest point was being enticed from a job I loved in 2018 to find a very different reality that nearly took my life.

WHAT'S IT LIKE behind the scenes?

I am a massive planner and live by the information I share with my clients. I have studied time management and observed so many business owners, that I have found a method that works for me. My extended family are ultra-supportive of what I do and together we enjoy the benefits of the hard work.

I have a home office, which is now in the garden, so that makes it much easier to leave it at the end of the day! From my past experiences, I have two reminder statements in my office. (1) 'Control the Controllable', which I have nailed to the frustration of those that want to talk to me about Covid! (2) 'Care about what other people think of you and you will always be their prisoner', which I am still working on as I am very sensitive to this!

My unhealthy obsession is 'business' and until recent times, work has come before most other things in my life. Gaining control again, with my own business, is incredible.

My own mentor is my guiding light of reality. His favourite quote is "there is one person's expectations that you will never meet. Your own!". Although I strive every day to do so!!

I like to share information to help others, which is my greatest pressure. New content, different ways to interact etc, but with a plan it works out fine.

HOW CAN PEOPLE WORK with you or buy from you?

Most of my clients are as a one-to-one mentoring relationship, as the preference is to have something bespoke for them, that purely considers their plans and ideas.

I also offer peer group mentoring via my Mastermind groups, plus an Online Business Development programme. The latter offers over 12 hours of content, sharing my thoughts, tools, and proven methods to help other businesses develop on their own, at their own pace.

The easiest way to work with me is ask!

Check out my website where I share a range of free resources and offer a personalised report to help business owners develop their business.

On my contact page, you can book some time in my diary to meet and explore how I could help.

I do offer free sessions with absolutely no obligation.

I appreciate people must get to know me, learn of my expertise and value, so I suggest connecting with me on social media to share the news and views.

WHO or WHAT are you thankful for?

My parents for shaping me for who I am today.

For my family and friends for their support.

For my children, my reason why.

For my health, having suffered serious health scares in the last two years.

To my clients for entrusting me to support them.

To my trusted network for all their support. Sorry far too many to name but an extra special mention of thanks to Tony Hobbs, Jackie Fitzgerald, and James Butler.

Ultimately, I am thankful for those that believe in me, support me and give me opportunities to enjoy 'getting out of bed', helping others and enjoying the resulting highs.