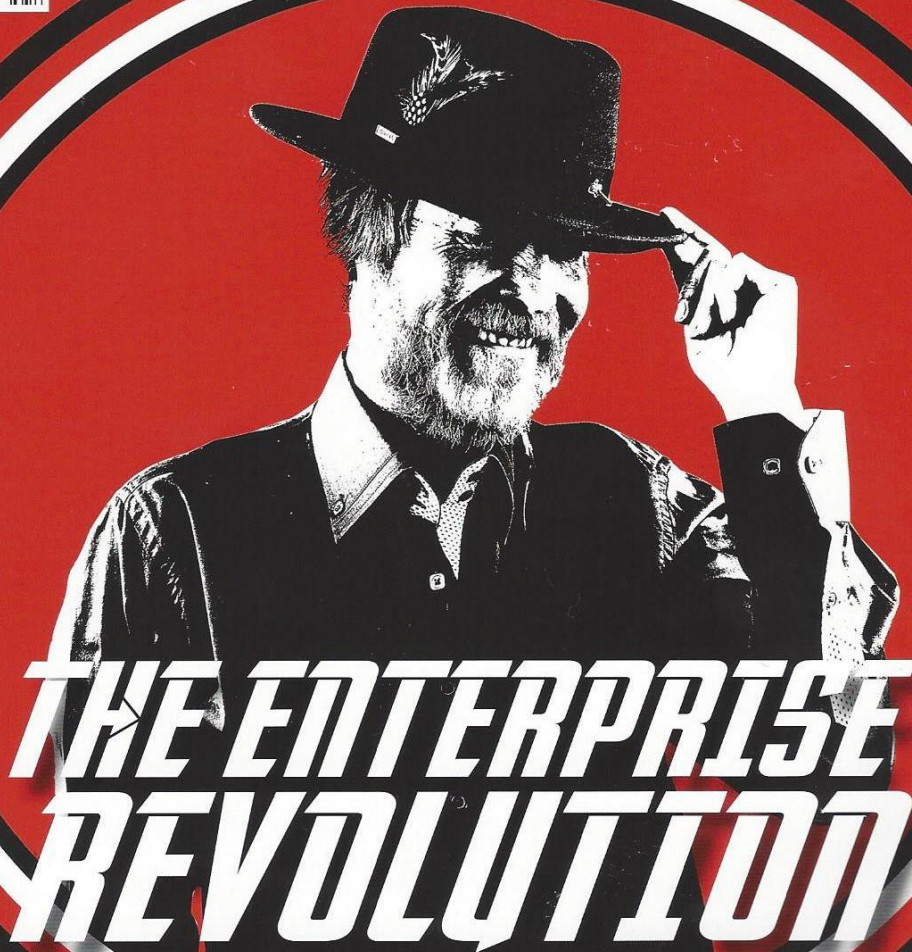


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## THE ENTERPRISE REVOLUTION

BY TONY ROBINSON

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# THE DAY I BECAME 'THE MICRO ENTERPRISE REVOLUTIONARY' (Or 'Billionaires, bullshit and balderdash')

WORDS: TONY ROBINSON OBE

## Yorkshire Nous

I have just watched my old Beverley Grammar school friend, Jim Ratcliffe, on television. As veteran business owners, on different planets regarding business size and earnings, it can be fun being old. I'm sure that Jim gets the whispers I get that we're past our sell by date but, hey, no-one can sack us.

He looks as fit as when we went on cycling holidays over 45 years ago. Jim was described in my paper this morning as 'the billionaire petrochemicals tycoon'. As the majority owner and chairman of Ineos, he was on television explaining how the closure of the Grangemouth site was averted. What I liked was that he explained very complex business issues in terms that everyone could understand. There was a complete absence of spin and bullshit.

## Grangemouth makes it clear who runs the country

However, I also realise that the Swiss based Ineos, the largest privately run company that operates in Britain, is perceived by many as having held an entire nation, Scotland, to ransom. It is the latest example of a major corporate doing what it likes knowing that our elected Government is outgunned - in money, lobbyists, lawyers, tax advisers and cojones...

There is no political willingness, from any party, to take on the rich and powerful. After all, the rich and powerful are getting richer and more powerful every month and most political leaders seek their backing to climb the political ladder and then end up in their employment, directly or indirectly, after they step down.

Another paper (Owen Jones in The Independent) said of Jim 'The power exercised by the likes of Jim Ratcliffe depends on our collective resignation, a sense of fatalism and powerlessness. Grangemouth could be a turning point, a catalyst for other employers to demolish what remaining power and rights working people (including the self-employed) have. Or it could be a moment where enough

of us realise what is happening to modern Britain and - in the finest tradition of this country - do something about it.'

## Talking about a revolution?

My light bulb moment came from the phrase 'rights working people have'. In the past when I've heard the phrase 'workers' rights' I've associated it with employees taking action to get fair pay, fair terms and conditions of employment with safe and healthy working conditions.

Government, in order to back major corporates; talk about being 'Employer led'. This means the bigger employers, in each traditional industrial and commercial sector, dictate what is in the UK's sectoral, employment, training, welfare, and even taxation; policies, programmes and regulations.

I realised that this Government and large employers against employees and the unemployed battlefield is not where the action should be to 'do something about it'. It is, frankly, old hat. Within the next decade nearly half the 'working people', in the UK, including those at school today, will be self-employed or business owners running their own micro enterprise (0-9 employees).

Large employers are in boom time regarding income but meltdown regarding the number of employees they have. Against this the number of self-employed inexorably grows - faster and faster - up 127,000, in the last year, to 4.6 million. There are six times more self-employed and micro enterprise owners than there were 40 years ago. 1 in 6 working people are already self-employed. The only people that can 'do something about it' are us - the self-employed and independent business owners.

Just a few days earlier Russell Brand said 'I don't mind giving up some of my baubles and balderdash for a genuinely fair system, so can we create one?'

Owen Jones and Russell Brand plead for change in how businesses are run so that there is more fairness. Yet they know that apathy, resignation and the sheer size of Brand's 'despondent underclass' means that ordinary citizens, and certainly business owners who need to feed at any trough provided by Government and the Corporates, are not going to take anyone on.

#### **It may be a quiet revolution – apart from me**

I've been quite shocked by the vitriolic response to Russell Brand's New Statesman article and interview with Jeremy Paxman. The difficult-to-spell and most-blokes-using-it-won't-know-what-it-means word 'vacuous' sums up what most critics think about Mr Brand. They suggest that he's an empty headed cynic trying to cause aggravation and yet has no plan about what to do.

Fortunately, I do have a plan and I'm happy to lead the revolution. The only problem is that most of those that I'll be leading into battle will remain silent. There's no better way to earn a living than having your own business but it is a really, really tough way to earn your living.

Self-employed people and business owners simply cannot afford to upset potential or existing customers or suppliers by joining the revolution that I'm appointing myself the leader of.

I can be a pain in the backside to Government (all political parties). My view is that the biggest corporates will not change their practices and that government will not stop backing the largest corporates either. However, Government can get a better deal for the money it gives these corporates.

Firstly, Government, can back the continually growing micro enterprise sector (the vast majority of which are self-employed with no employees) by, as per my petition <http://www.change.org/en-GB/petitions/uk-government-stop-funding-the-corporate-thieves>, negotiating better terms (e.g. 'pay all suppliers within 30 days' – current average is a criminal 68 days) for all Corporates that Government contracts with, either as supplier or as a beneficiary of funded support.

Secondly, it can create a cost base for business that allows the self-employed and business owners to; at least, achieve the living wage for their efforts. Everyone I meet from overseas says the costs, of operating a UK micro business, even a home based business, are far too high. Enabling lower energy costs, broadband, telecoms, business rates, passenger transport, fuel along with lower cost of compliance with regulations are all within the power of Government.

Thirdly, give all prospective and existing business owners the opportunity to gain the know how to survive and thrive. These three steps can create a modern business eco system that will deliver a fairer deal to all its owners, employees, suppliers and communities.

#### **We now must live in reality (Russell Brand)**

I hate meaningless business jargon and Americanised happy-clappy speakers. I much prefer listening to real business people like Tim Campbell, Jacqueline Gold and Kanya King. Don't get me wrong I've read, watched and respect all the gurus but despite billions of people having embraced their message only a few achieve their 'dreams'. For example, the vast majority of America's economic wealth and political power is in the hands of about one thousand families and none of them look like stepping aside anytime soon. Anyway, it's a good thing I don't attend, my faux namesake, Tony Robbins events, as with my lack of co-ordination and spatial awareness, with the fire-walking and tile smashing, I'd cause extreme chaos and injury to his delegates.

However, it is very important that we understand that the reality is that the wealthiest business leaders haven't got there because of their talent in dream making, goal setting and a positive mental attitude but by other means. This is important because anyone suggesting ways to change the business eco system, and I'm particularly thinking about me, is going to be criticised as being a negative, past their sell by date, maverick, failure.

#### **Making deals – honest or not – makes the money**

Jim Ratcliffe isn't likely to appear at Wembley Arena as a motivational speaker or on the telly as a celebrity endorsee to flog Government Start up Loans (I'm so worried about Start up Loans), but he explained business for what it is - common sense. The basic business principles at play apply equally to someone self-employed, with no employees, as 75% of all businesses are, right up to the 6 Big Corporates that dominate each sector.

Except that small and micro businesses, predominantly, make their money from satisfying customers and suppliers and their local community whereas many of the very largest Corporates now do it by ripping off their suppliers and customers, price fixing, gambling, settling when they get caught, paying fines as a cost of doing business and sloshing around in Government money to support them. This allows them to make their 'loads a dosh' to pay their executives piss-taking, pay and perks packages. I don't blame the corporate executives as they are doing what modern corporate business is there to do. But, I do blame Government for allowing it to happen when they could level the playing field through budget allocation and negotiation. See my petition: [www.change.org/en-GB/petitions/uk-government-stop-funding-the-corporate-thieves](http://www.change.org/en-GB/petitions/uk-government-stop-funding-the-corporate-thieves)

Rant over. I will add Jim to my long list of mega successful business owners I've met that I believe all share one key enterprise skill. That skill is deal making. Over time, there are many functions within the business that the owner will delegate or contract out, but, in my experience, negotiating the important deals is something they continue to do.

#### **The Enterprise Skills Set**

Making deals is one of six, generic and essential enterprise skills that through research, and my experience of working with many hundreds of start-ups and business owners, I believe are necessary for a successful enterprise. The other five are: managing cash flow; winning and keeping customers; pricing; test trading; online and off-line collaboration/networking.

Of these six enterprise skills the easiest one to teach in schools, colleges and universities is making deals-negotiating. Win-win negotiating skills allows the prospective business owner to seek and seize opportunities, sell for the best margin, buy for the best margin, develop multiple income streams and get the best return on all assets, including people.

It is also a skill that is a great confidence booster. This is very important in a start-up where sometimes it seems the whole world is trying to sell you stuff, including the Government and the Banks, or rip you off. The other five skills should be taught at school too but they are certainly best developed 'by doing' in the context of the specific business that you have started and are running.

#### **Learning from other business owners**

All of these skills and the common sense practical know how needed to succeed are best gained from other business owners - people who have got the T-shirt for starting and successfully running their own business.

I'm very fortunate that throughout my 28 years of being my own boss, I've had a business partner, Clare Francis. Between us we now have this enterprise skills set. In fact I realise that I'm incredibly lucky to have built businesses with three fantastic women business partners who had all learned their enterprise know-how from one or more of their parents. This wasn't planned.

In fact, when Clare and I, in 1986, left very well paid jobs to start our business, which is still running today, we naively thought that all the management training and experience we'd had from different sector leading corporates would be of value in our business. We had post-graduate business diplomas and I'd been Chief Executive of a £20 million company. These business qualifications and executive experience proved totally useless, as was the start up advice we were given by an ex-bank manager.

Thank goodness that Clare always held the money as we'd have had an early demise if we'd spent the little money we had on my marketing ideas. Fortunately, eventually, we realised we did have a fall back reference point as both Clare and I had fathers that started and ran their own businesses which we'd been involved with.

**Rocking Enterprise Families**

Then in 1996 Clare and I founded an organisation to improve start up training and support in the UK called SFEDI. It grew into a substantial social enterprise but in 2004 it all went desperately wrong, no fault of the staff. So Ruth Lowbridge, one of the non-executive directors, and I had to start again from scratch with it as we had to make all the staff redundant and vacate our premises. Ruth was a successful small business owner and her mother had started a successful small business too.

In 2012, Tina Boden and I co-founded the Enterprise Rockers CIC – a network of business owner networks. Tina had been a business owner straight from school and her parents had run their own businesses all of Tina's life. Tina credits me with persuading her that she didn't need to waste her time on a business degree and I credit her with being the most skilled business owner I've met who achieves more in a morning than I do in a week.

You can see from the above why we founded the free to join in Enterprise Rockers band. Apart from having a passion for micro enterprise (0-9 employees) Tina and I are convinced that business owners will survive and thrive if they are in a self-help community of business owners. It can be the difference between 2 out of 3 start-ups closing within 3 years and 4 out of 5 continuing trading.

The Enterprise Rockers Community is nearly two years old. It is, we think, the only global community of micro enterprise owners that is totally independent of government and corporate sponsorship and funding. All the money that has been put into it has come from Mrs Boden and me. All the effort to create it, so that everything is there that a business owner needs to survive and thrive, has been provided by volunteers - Rockers, Band Leaders and high profile, Head Roadies.

**Stop Pouring Government Skills and Business Support Funding Down a Corporate Drain**

Let's go back to Grangemouth and Jim Ratcliffe, the Chair and Owner of Ineos. My guess is that a third party will have been involved in the negotiations to re-open Grangemouth. The third party with Ineos, Unite (the trade union) will have been UK Government. Jim may be regarded as reclusive, some say secretive, and shy but he

will not have been afraid to ask Government what they would do for Ineos in order for them to re-open the plant and invest £300 million in it. After all, Jim faced 600 bankers not so long ago to ask them to cut him some slack with his mountain of debt.

Government would have mentioned the funded programmes they had on offer and my wild guess would be that one of the offers they'll have made to Ineos would be money for up skilling the workforce. Government have consistently, through the last twenty years, spent most of their support to business in the form of skills training funding, including apprenticeships, for major employers. The theory is that increased skills lead to increased productivity which in turn leads to economic growth.

I don't have problems with the theory but I do have problems with the way they allocate the skills funding training. It is lazy, politically expedient and has not created jobs or growth. Most of it goes to the large corporates in each sector for them to do the training they should do anyway, at their own expense.

A year ago we had the scandal of McDonald's spending £10 million apprenticeship funding on existing employees – not one new employee. In fact £20 million was shared across 9 major employers and created only 2559 jobs. Just a week ago we had the scandal of the training provider, Elmwood, which has received £100 million of Government funding to provide free training, going into administration.

This is because it is being investigated for major fraud - claiming funding for trainees that didn't exist. This led to its one major client Morrisons Supermarket, which was training their existing employees, to change provider. Morrisons and McDonald's usually win a National Training Award at the annual ceremony I've been lucky enough to attend but I'd rather they had award winning training which hadn't been funded by taxpayers. BAE is the latest example of an exemplar government funded apprenticeship provider to cut jobs rather than make jobs.

**Skill up the Enterprise Sector**

My point is that the large employers are not where the economic growth from skills funding will come. I've never understood why they get all this Government funding. The new jobs and the new growth is coming from a sector that Government, despite my campaigns for 20 years, do not officially recognise – the micro enterprise sector including all start-ups – 95% of all UK businesses.

If the owners of each of these enterprises don't learn how to start and run their own business from working with business owner parents like Clare, Ruth, Tina and I did – where do they get this practical enterprise know-how from?

A high proportion of the Government's skills funding should be going on prospective business owners, including the self-employed, training and support. They don't do it because it's easier to get targets achieved and the money to a small number of large employers. The CBI would self-combust if government money went into the micro-enterprise sector.

**Micro Enterprise is now and the future**

I contend that it is very important for the UK to get serious about providing enterprise skills and know how to all starting up business owners to reduce mortality rates. There are six times more micro enterprises in the UK (4.5 million) than when I was at university.

# “The enterprise skill set should be taught, by business owners, to everyone starting a new business in the UK. This can be achieved by a public money / private sector partnership”

This includes all start-ups, 500,000 a year with 6% of all start-ups becoming substantial businesses. The more that survive, the more substantial businesses there will be.

On top of that corporate jobs are in meltdown. Nearly all the new jobs, self-employed and employed are coming from the micro-enterprise sector. There are 127,000 more businesses, micro enterprises, in the UK than a year ago. The number of start-ups increases year by year because there aren't the jobs.

By 2020 it is forecast that 50% of the big corporates / large employers' tasks will be contracted out, including to micro enterprises and self-employed / freelancers. Nearly all my micro enterprise owner friends already use VAs and freelancers from such as People per Hour. Most do not intend to take on more employees and much prefer to collaborate with other self-employed and business owners.

## Enterprise not 'Entrepreneur'

So you can see why I believe this enterprise skill set is vital. You'll notice that I haven't called it an 'entrepreneur' skill set. This is because the media, the business opportunity industry and the Government have made the term entrepreneur associated with size of business and wealth being the measure of success. As such it is only the owner-managers of 'SMEs' that Government are willing to train.

Conversely, most micro enterprise owners see running their own business as the best available way of earning a decent living - not building an empire or gaining extreme wealth. Unfortunately, since Thatcher, Major, Blair and Mandelson showed the way for politicians to become multi-millionaires most politicians assume any business person or celebrity that is rich is an entrepreneur.

Thirteen years ago, with a number of business owner colleagues under the leadership of Sarah Anderson CBE and the late Linda Ammon, we managed to get £60 million Government investment into the training of business owners. Unfortunately it was classed as leadership and management training and so constituted business and strategic planning skills and entrepreneurship training which often resembled the lessons learned from wealthy business leaders. So it didn't touch on the 'Be Your Own Boss' enterprise skill set that I've described and know is necessary.

## Fabulously successful micro enterprise owners - but not rich

Everyone that starts and runs their own business is a fabulous success but most people in the policy making square mile regard people like me as 'failures' or 'lifestylers'. I've even been asked if I'm a millionaire and when I've said 'No' they've replied 'I can't have you in my circle as I only surround myself with successful people'. How stupid is that! Yet almost every self-improvement book and seminar says surround yourself with 5 or 6 seriously successful people and ditch those that aren't. To be fair it's only been blokes that question my worth - the same blokes that assumed Clare was my wife or PA rather than my business partner - and Clare has been a millionaire as long as I've known her - from her father's business.

My wife, Eileen, has always been cynical about 'entrepreneurs' and has loved her jobs as a librarian and I'm really glad that I didn't take the Napoleon Hill, Jim Rohn, Tony Robbins and Brian Tracy type advice to have this immediate network of a small number of successful people and move away from those that do not share your vision.

Eileen has been fabulously successful in all she's done it's just that wealth creation has never been a primary goal - as it isn't for 95% of business owners in the UK.

I also got a tad disillusioned with some of the 'collateral damage' of the leadership, motivational, positive mental attitude and dream building speakers when I was Chief Executive of Amway (UK). Their creed as to what a 'winner' looked like and how they behaved placed me under extreme pressure from my bosses to ditch my favourite light brown suit and shave off my beard. It also meant I had to bargain with Eileen not to say what she felt about many of the multi-level marketing 'leaders' who had cars, houses, jewellery and a lifestyle that they really could not afford.

## The UK must try the Micro Enterprise Way

The enterprise skill set should be taught, by business owners, to everyone starting a new business in the UK. This can be achieved by a public money / private sector partnership. All the local and online enterprise communities, networks and, even, the new breed of hubs (like WinWeb Hubs, Workspace and Virtual Office providers, modern Enterprise Agencies) can provide the learning in places where prospective and new business owners already trust and go to. It will improve the survival rate and increase the growth rate of enterprises in the UK.

However, there is another lesson that Jim Ratcliffe gave us in his interviews about Grangemouth this year. That is that businesses will not survive unless their cost base is low enough. UK Government have made the average earnings of micro business owners go so low in the UK that half of them are earning below the living wage. Not only shouldn't Government continue to fund the large corporates (see my petition) that have unfair contract terms with their small suppliers they must also do something about them ripping off their self-employed and micro enterprise customers. Energy, fuel, telecoms/broadband, rates, cost of compliance with regulations must all go down if we are to create an Enterprising UK.

## A new and enterprising reality

The final word I'll leave to Russell Brand who made the news over the last few weeks. 'Along with the absolute, all encompassing, total corruption of our political agencies, apathy is the biggest obstacle to change'.

My revolution is a micro enterprise revolution. I, as the leader, solemnly declare that I will do all I can, for the rest of my life and beyond, to aid the empowerment of the UK micro enterprise sector.

**This means that my revolution must ensure the micro enterprise sector gets the support, skills, know-how, cash flow, regulations, taxation and cost base to survive and thrive. My revolution will ensure that all those in the micro enterprise sector spend at least 25% of their weekly personal and business shopping with other independent businesses. My revolution will ensure that all companies in receipt of government support and funding pay their suppliers within 30 days and their employees the living wage.**

The success of the micro enterprise sector will shake the UK out of its apathy and provide the jobs and economic growth that will lead to a much more vibrant society, better local communities and a much fairer distribution of wealth and greater equality of earnings.



## Micro-mania

**ENTREPRENEURSHIP** Nearly one in six of the UK's workforce is now running their own micro-enterprise – a figure predicted to rise as high as one in five by 2020, thanks to the digital economy making it easier and cheaper to start and run a business as an individual.

If you are one of that growing percentage, you'll be interested to hear that Enterprise Rockers – the free-to-join community interest organisation that is co-founded and co-funded by serial entrepreneur Tina Boden and motivational speaker and author Tony Robinson (pictured



left) – has announced that the inaugural annual MicroBizMattersDay is taking place on 9 January.

MicroBizMattersDay will call on individuals who work for themselves,

**Better business:**  
Enterprise Rockers  
is calling on people  
who work for  
themselves to  
support each other

along with their suppliers and their customers, to take concrete action for nine minutes to make business life better for each other. The actions will have hashtags on social media – #customers, #cashflow and #chat.

"These tiny drops in the ocean will create a tsunami of micro-business improvement through the power of plenty – that's the power unleashed when many micro-business owners take action to help each other in a concerted way," says Robinson.

For more information, visit [www.microbizmattersday.rockers](http://www.microbizmattersday.rockers)

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<http://www.theguardian.com/media-network/media-network-blog/2014/aug/26/state-kickstart-micro-enterprise-revolution>

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## The state should help kickstart a micro-enterprise revolution

UK government should treat micro-enterprise as a separate sector and boost its funding, says startup guru **Tony Robinson**

In our digital economy it is as cheap as chips to start and run a global business. However, government and large corporations could do more to support new micro-enterprises (which have less than nine employees).

Nearly one in six of the UK workforce is running their own micro-enterprise and it will be one in five by 2020. Most of the innovation, creativity and growth in the economy come from the 5m strong, micro-enterprise sector. At least half a million micro-enterprises start each year.

### The digital world is our lobster

Digital technology makes it easier, cheaper, safer and smarter to start up your own business than any time in history. In the UK there are 40% more micro-enterprises than there were in 2000. All other business types have experienced static or negative growth.

Twenty years ago to start a business we needed expensive equipment, leased premises, cars, staff, insurances, an accountant, solicitor, broker, professional and trade association memberships and a huge direct marketing and travel/events budget. Today each partner, in different towns, has a small office and there is a cheap or free app for everything to do with our business.

There is a free YouTube video showing you how to use everything and online trading (eBay, Amazon, Etsy) and communications (Google+, Vonage, Skype) platforms allow us to test, trade and go global.

We buy other people's services by the hour (on [Peopleperhour](#) and [Freelancer](#)). Most of our marketing is cheap, digital, social, per click or plug-and-play. We now have no employees but a superbly talented, creative and collaborative team of business owner friends.

### What the government shouldn't do

The government knows the micro-enterprise boom will continue whatever it does or doesn't. However it must stop rehashing old schemes. For example:

The average [government start up loan](#) (£5,330) is nearly half of what the average business owner will earn in their first 12 months and 10 times more than the average cost to start a business. This is because it is based on business plans rather than today's small steps trading model and because the more money the provider lends the more they make.

They should stop running schemes aimed at finding and funding the "high growth businesses" of the future. This is because, government providers cannot pick winners, even if they're all dragons. Also, micro-enterprise is not big business and most are not about employing and managing people.

### **What the government should do**

Around 6% of startups become substantial businesses. Policies to help all new micro-enterprise owners survive would bring a massive return. Over 85% could survive with the right support.

Micro-enterprise owners, from countries where it is great to start and run your own business, always point out to me the high costs and barriers to "going it alone" in the UK. Government does have influence with large corporations. It gives many of them large amounts of money each year. It could, ask all large corporations receiving public funds to pay their suppliers within 30 days – instead of the current 68 day average.

Government could reduce the cost of start-ups' energy, transport, telecoms and broadband. It could remove barriers to global trading with free Wi-Fi in public places and on public transport and reduce the cost of compliance with legislation across the board. It could provide tax incentives to start a business while in a job or in education.

Micro-enterprise should be treated by the government as a separate sector. It is crazy that the 95% of businesses that are micro get less than 5% of the government's business support.

### **What do we need?**

We need large corporations supplying micro-enterprise owners to appreciate it is good business to treat them fairly. For example, this year 99% of Lloyds Bank suppliers' bills will be paid within 30 days.

Virgin is doing great things. We need more disruptive, high profile entrepreneurs who have achieved global success to change our enterprise education system and pre-start support. It must be grassroots stuff like Victoria Lennox has achieved with [Start-up Canada](#). Everyone should have the know-how, know-who and digital skills to start and run their own business.

[Stefan Topfer of Win Web](#) has introduced Win Web hubs into colleges so that students and the local community can test their ideas and start and run their enterprises. I think we also need a Dr Lim Kokwing of Malaysia to transform our education system. He is an entrepreneur credited with leading Malaysian enterprise and economic growth. He even, has his own, non-elitist, university where all the students are part of a global classroom.

There are many independent business owners in many countries that do enterprise better than we do in Britain, who can help us. I'm talking about a micro-enterprise revolution.

*Tony Robinson OBE is co-founder of the Enterprise Rockers CIC*

# ROCK 'N' ROLLS



**Micro-enterprise champion, Tony Robinson OBE, thinks far too many small businesses go to the wall. He tells Natalie de Freitas what needs to change.**

**Micro-businesses – those with under ten people – are more popular than ever: half a million of them start up every year. That's a 40 per cent rise on 2000. Today, one in seven working adults in the UK have their own business. Unfortunately, only 30 per cent of start-ups will survive after three years.**

Entrepreneur and micro-enterprise champion, Tony Robinson, thinks things could be different. He believes that, with the right support, 80 per cent could still be trading after three years, and six per cent could grow into substantial enterprises.

Tony has been helping entrepreneurs run their companies better since 1986, when he set up the Business Advisory Bureau (BAB) Ltd with Clare Francis. He had made the leap from Managing Director of a company with a turnover of £26m.

## Stepping out

"I made the transition because I have always been passionately interested in learning new things," he says. "I've always been very ambitious in making a difference, far more than having a massive profit motive.

"It was the best thing I ever did," he continues. "We found a niche as one of the first companies to offer small businesses in the UK HR and marketing support services."

## TONY'S THREE TIPS FOR KEEPING MOTIVATED

### 1 It's not about what you do, it's what you do for others

You'll find that your motivation will come from positive feedback from others. Micro-business owners will always create greater customer satisfaction than larger companies because what matters to me is my customer satisfaction. I want you to say: 'Tony did a good job for me'. If they say that, then I've got my next customer.

### 2 You've got to keep learning

Every time you feel at a low or static point then learning something new will jolt your energy levels up.

### 3 Always look for opportunities

No one I know in business rests on their original ideas. Always look for new challenges and new targets to achieve. You know that train guard making everyone laugh over the tannoy? The organisation, or their boss, doesn't matter to them. They're getting motivation from happy customers. The organisation will then recognise what a great job that employee is doing.

They only made £12,000 in the first two years, developing leadership, management and enterprise training. Tony believes it is still successful today because he stood by the fundamental principles of business.

"You have to know your customer and be prepared to adapt to change," he says.

Since then, Tony has devoted his career to spreading the word among micro-business owners. Since setting up the BAB, he has co-owned two more businesses, become an author and professional speaker, and even received the OBE for his services to small firms and training. He co-founded and developed the Small Firms Enterprise Development Initiative (SFEDI) in 1995, moving from CEO to Chairman in 1999.

## Rock on in business!

But he became tired of the Government's reluctance to back his wish list for micro-enterprise. So last year he launched Enterprise Rockers with business partner, Tina Boden. His fellow entrepreneur bought her first business at the age of 21. Tony describes the Rockers as a "disruptive force of hundreds of thousands of business owners making their business lives better".

There are currently 25,000 activists in the network. They have met through social media, at gigs and via other events. The organisation happily collaborates with other like-minded organisations. The community is free-to-join, and inter trading business owners find various ways to share resources and knowledge. Together, he says, they solve problems, seize opportunities, save money and gain new business.

"Tina and I had a vision to make the network of networks. It would be the 'power of plenty'," he says. "With hundreds and thousands of us getting involved, there will come a point when a company will say, 'maybe I should be talking to these people'. Government will then start coming to us because we are doing the right things to help each other to survive and thrive."

Tony puts the success of the Enterprise Rockers down to its lack of corporate structure and the resulting freedom. He is supported by an able team of Head Roadies and Band Leaders, many of whom are high profile and speak at Rockers gigs around the UK. For example, the first *The Apprentice* winner, Tim Campbell MBE, has 'gigged' with Tony. ▶





“The fastest way to be valued in any organisation is not through being the first hire, nor because you’re better at playing politics, but because your contribution is the best it can be.”

TONY ROBINSON OBE

As well as connecting business owners, the organisation also wants micro-business owners to trade with each other more – and for consumers and large companies to buy more products and services from micro-businesses. They are trying to spread the message, across generations, that self-employment is a great way to make a living.

It’s in just this way that business owners need to work together if they are to succeed, says Tony, and particularly in such a difficult market.

“Owners must share knowledge in order to unlock their potential. Businesses fail when people running them have no support network, or they’re not talking it through with another business owner.

“You’ve got to do test trading,” he says, “and you can’t learn business from a teacher – only from other business owners.”

Tony thinks there are as many routes to success as there are business owners, and that it is important for each person to define exactly what it would mean to them. It’s not necessarily about money.

“I will never earn as much as I did when I was a managing director. But I’ve got something better than that: I have control over my own destiny. I am flexible so I have diverse income streams instead of one, fixed one. Ultimately I equate success with the happiness of my family. They come first.”

#### Control of your own destiny

Taking control of your destiny can help anyone with their careers – not just small business owners. “The fastest way to be valued in any organisation is not through being the first hire, nor because you’re better at playing politics, but because your contribution is the best it can be. It’s all about your skills and know how and getting them seen.”

As well as excellence, the traits that Tony finds most valuable are passion, persistence and integrity, the last being the most important. And ups and downs are just part of the experience.

“If people trust you, you will turn things around again. If you don’t have integrity, you will get ignored. If you work hard enough, constantly learn new things, and take opportunities, I believe you will get through.

“Anybody can achieve great things if they learn how to do it, practice at things and get better at them.” ■



Learn more about Enterprise Rockers activity. Visit [www.enterpriserockers.co.uk](http://www.enterpriserockers.co.uk)

A QUESTION OF SUPPORT

# The case for micro business owners supporting themselves

**Frustrated by many years of his recommendations to Government ministers falling on deaf ears, TONY ROBINSON has taken the bit between his teeth and set up an alternative approach to providing micro-business support.**

**T**owards the end of the last millennium, along with a band of other business owners, I challenged the Government and banks' accepted doctrine – that everlasting business success comes to those with a thirty-page business plan (with all boxes ticked) who were trained, dressed and spoke like corporate managers. This has earned us much criticism and the labels of being 'negative', 'troublemakers' and 'out of touch'.

We chose not to follow the established practice of asking academics, television celebrities and large company chief executives what should be done. Instead, we asked small and micro business owners what they had to do, and needed to know, in order to survive and thrive in their businesses.

We looked at what factors improved the survival rate of start ups and what business support and training is available in countries that are acknowledged as being better than Britain at developing successful new businesses.

And then in January 2012, **Tina Boden** and I founded a global band of micro enterprise owners, intent on making business life better for the whole of their community. We're on a mission to improve the skills, knowledge and survival rates of those starting and running their own enterprise in Britain.

So what exactly are these principles that we believe will provide the most useful support to prospective and existing micro enterprise owners in the UK?

## **1** There are a lot of us but we're worth helping

There are a lot of micro businesses in the UK and we're growing in number every year (there are currently 4.5 million of us – 95% of all businesses). We're difficult for Government to reach and engage with. It would require an army to support us enough to improve our cumulative performance.

These are all big reasons why no Government will provide significant business support and training to micro enterprises.

With start ups and existing micro enterprises, Governments attempt to either 'pick winners' who are deserving of their limited funds and support, or they ensure that as many of the unemployed or those 'on benefits' as possible go self employed. It still doesn't represent a significant amount of publicly funded business support. Indeed, four successive Governments have given over 95% of all Government employment, support and training funding to the minority 5% of larger UK businesses.

These 5% of larger companies are on a downward spiral, and have been for a decade, in terms of the number of jobs provided to the UK – and the amount of corporation tax they pay, too. The stock of micro enterprises in the UK continues to increase as the availability of jobs in larger companies decreases. Up to a half a million people a year are starting their own business, not because of the Government's enterprise policies, or because they want to be the next Bill Gates, but because for most it is the best, or only, available way to earn a living.

Micro enterprises are worth helping. New micro enterprises provide most of the new jobs and most of the innovation, and micro enterprises make the most significant contribution to their local communities.

Give start ups the right help over the first eighteen months of their existence and two to three times as many of them will survive more than three years. Indeed, some research has shown that as many as 85% of businesses, with the right support, can survive over three years and 6% will become substantial employers.

**We're on a mission to improve the skills, knowledge and survival rates of those starting and running their own enterprise in Britain**

2

**Micro owners are the best people to help micro owners**

Micro enterprise owners understand and recognise what it takes to earn your living from running your own business. Government understands more easily what to do to help businesses with over 10 staff, and especially medium sized enterprises with over 50 staff (the M in 'SMEs'). They understand them because these enterprises look more like the organisations their business education and training described to them.

These 'SMEs' are businesses with formalised missions, strategies, plans, budgets, systems and processes. They have managers and leaders that look and behave like politicians and bankers. They consider these larger businesses as 'serious' and likely to provide the winners for the economy. Access to finance is the hot topic so that banks can invest in 'SMEs' for them to grow bigger and employees can trade in their employment rights for a share of the success. The high tech, global businesses of the future will come from SME start ups and they're likely to be found in universities and business schools.

Micro enterprises, especially the self employed, are often misclassified and misunderstood, by anyone other than micro enterprise owners themselves, as just 'lifestyle', 'freelancers', 'not serious businesses', 'not entrepreneurial enough', not 'wealth creators' and were even once described to the author of this article as 'the great unwashed'.

It is true that most micro enterprise owners will encourage start ups, if they can, to bootstrap rather than borrow, to test trade online (on third-party platforms) and offline (via markets/car boots/exhibitions) and to start their business while they are in a job or have another source of income. As importantly, unlike Government, micro enterprise owners do not believe everyone is suited to starting and running their own business and will positively discourage some people from doing so. All this is important to survival rates.

Many government-funded start-up schemes put the emphasis on the loan or investment, the big business plan, management skills and a mentor with more generalist business experience

than the start up. Most micro enterprise owners believe that a newly redundant corporate executive advising a start up in any capacity is just wrong.

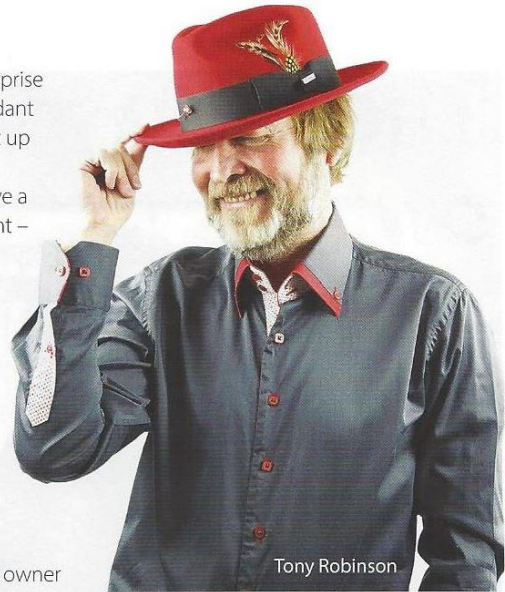
So micro enterprise owners have a different view to that of Government – who knew??

3

**Gaining the essential skills and know how**

The skills and know how required to start and run a business successfully depend on the type of business and must be viewed in the context of what the business owner considers to be successful for that type of business. Most business owners need to have someone in their business that is competent at winning and keeping customers, making deals, managing cash-flow, handling the regulations surrounding that business and providing the products and services. In most cases, especially at start up, the business owner will do all of these.

They are very different abilities from those that most corporate managers have. The business owner's main role in nearly all



Tony Robinson

micro enterprises is winning and keeping customers. Whether you can persuade enough customers to buy your product or service is the acid test of whether you have a viable business idea and why test trading is vital. Yet in larger companies these customer-facing roles are delegated by managers to, often, the lower paid staff. Not that micro enterprise owners can afford be status and salary conscious – the average earnings of a micro business

▶ page 6

**The Enterprise Rockers**

**Enterprise Rockers** was established by **Tony Robinson** and **Tina Boden** in January 2012. Since then they have been working hard to grow their global band of micro enterprise owners. Their band, and the support principles that have underpinned their community, are those that Tony has researched and proven over many years.

The Enterprise Rockers is a free-to-join-in community with thousands of different opinions, hundreds of different campaigns led by different people, and no single political or lobbying position. The Rockers have come together because they share one common belief. The belief is that business owners are the best people to help other business owners to keep going – to help each other to survive and thrive.

For more information, go to [www.enterpriserockers.co.uk](http://www.enterpriserockers.co.uk)



Tina Boden

# REPORTER

## LET'S ROCK FOR ENTERPRISE

The most fabulous  
band in the land

TONY ROBINSON



If you're thinking of starting a business or have started your own business, the great news is that you're definitely not alone. You can join in with the most fabulous band in the land and you don't even need to play an instrument! This band will keep you going. You've a three times better chance of surviving your first 3 years in business if you get the right help. There's no better help around than a global community of business owners.

In the UK alone there are 4.5 million micro enterprise owners, which is 95% of all businesses. They provide a third of employment, most of the new jobs and nearly a fifth of UK turnover. Yet micro businesses, which are the growing, backbone of the economy don't get the recognition from governments or the support they need to survive and thrive.

So, in January 2012, after a year of listening, Tina Boden and Tony Robinson OBE founded the Enterprise Rockers Global Community of micro (0-9 employees) enterprise owners. It has one aim; to make running your own business better for everyone, everywhere. It's free to join in and is totally independent.

All the money, time and effort that has been put into developing this massive self-help community and all the practical support available has come from the founder members – all micro enterprise owners themselves.

### Rocking Co- Founders, Band Leaders and Head Roadies

Tina and Tony own and run different businesses, are from different generations, have different political views and have very different families and friends but they agree on one important thing – enterprise rocks. The best people to make it rock harder and louder are micro enterprise owners themselves.

Before launching the Enterprise Rockers the founder members recruited other business owners to be bandleaders. Bandleaders support the online and offline networks of business owners. Because Enterprise Rockers isn't a club or an association but is a self- help community, Rockers are usually in other networks too. Enterprise Rockers is a network of networks giving micro enterprise the 'Power of Plenty'.

Now the Rockers' not only have Band Leaders, they also have Head Roadies. Regular articles in this magazine will introduce you to these very special people – all running their own businesses, but acknowledged experts in their field.

### Join in and keep rocking – it's free

Be a Rocker and get involved with this brilliant community of micro enterprise owners of all ages, from all backgrounds and with no boundaries to what they can achieve with their Power of Plenty. It'll help you keep going and help others too. You can join them @EnterpriseRocks on Twitter or the Enterprise Rockers groups, on Linked In and Facebook and can even register your business to trade, free, with other Rockers on [www.EnterpriseRockers.co.uk](http://www.EnterpriseRockers.co.uk)

It's More Than OK to Be Micro - Meet the Enterprise Rockers  
Is there a Rocker in you?

To be micro is fab. What's not to like about having less than ten employees? Most Enterprise Rockers around the world started their own business to control their own destiny, be their own boss and to earn a decent living doing what they wanted to do. We're passionate about our businesses and we are enterprising people but, in this rare case, size doesn't matter.

9 out of every 10 business owners around the world have less than ten employees. 7 out of 10 have no employees at all. We don't measure success, income, profit or personal earnings in terms of the number of employees. In fact, some of our wealthiest Rockers are also passionate about collaborating with other Rockers to grow their businesses, rather than taking on employees. Most Rockers that have now got larger, global businesses with many employees, started with less than ten employees – in fact most started on their own.

There's a lot to be learned about how to be successful in your own business from the Enterprise Rockers Co-Founders, Head Roadies and Band Leaders and this regular feature will introduce you to them and what they have learned. Here Tony Robinson OBE, co-founder of the Enterprise Rockers says what he has learned recently from Tina and Asta and Stefan. You won't find these three secrets of success in many start your own business books – but they should be!

### Tina's passion builds positive business networks:

Tina Boden, who co-founded the Enterprise Rockers with me, is a superb networker, collaborator and buddy to have around your business. Tina uses these qualities to grow her businesses and others too. Tina uses the same qualities to raise humungous amounts for the charities she supports. Tina turns nothing into something through relationships and it means a lot to the Enterprise Rockers – it gives us the Power of Plenty. These qualities are like gold dust to a business owner.

There are others that would claim the same business know-how as Tina. Tina's know-how is learned from two decades of running her own businesses and seeing her parents run their business too. However, after seeing her in action for a couple of years now, I think I've found out her secret. The secret is passion. Tina spends all her hours doing what she really believes in and this makes her

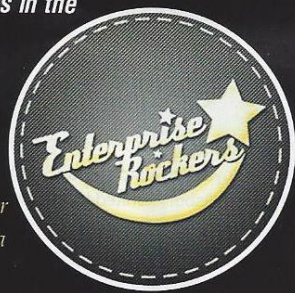


## Why I'm an Enterprise Rocker...

*I love what the organisation stands for... it provides a support network of British businesses as they work together to create powerful and sustainable partnerships. To coin a phrase, "We're all in this together"... Enterprise Rockers stands for businesses all uniting together to increase their chances of survival during these difficult economic times.*

*The architect and founder of Enterprise Rockers, Tony Robinson OBE, is a personal hero of mine. He has dedicated much of his career to promoting enterprise in the UK and improving the level of standards in the provision of business support. When I was asked to join Enterprise Rockers it was very much a case of where Tony goes... I'll follow!*

*Zia Mallick, Founder of Start Your Business Magazine & Head Media Roadie at Enterprise Rockers*



enthusiasm contagious. Everyone wants to be doing what Tina is doing because it feels worthwhile and fun. It's obvious really, isn't it? One of the biggest reasons to go into running your own business is to do with your time what you want, not what a boss wants you to do.

Tina by her own admission has hated it every time she has tried working for someone else but she also admits that sometimes she has chosen the wrong business to start and run too. Her experience of owning and running a retail shop wasn't a great one – nor was it successful.

So if you're thinking of starting a business make absolutely sure it's something you'll fall in love with doing. Business owners work long hours and business life intermingles with social and domestic life. You've got to enjoy what you're doing. Don't let any boring adviser take away from you what it is that will keep you going in your business.

If you're happy and passionate about what you do, you'll make your customers, suppliers and all in your team happy too. That's how positive referrals take place and your business will grow. Your passion will attract people, including customers, to you. Asta creatively achieves and his creative achievement is inspirational:

Asta Philpot has been in a wheelchair all his life. He's very, very happy about that – he wasn't expected to live more than a few days and he loves every minute of his life. Like all Enterprise Rockers he owns and runs his business and like many of the Rockers he appears quite regularly on television and speaks to large audiences. Asta is Enterprise Rockers Head Roadie for Film and Stage and has a photographic and video studio in Leeds.

As an old Rocker, that has seen a lot of fakes and frauds in twenty-seven years of running businesses, it is just a delight to be in his creative company. Two hours with Asta and I feel as if I'm walking on sunshine. Yet all of this delight, happiness and creativity that is Asta emanates from someone that has to rely on others to put together the sets, the sound, take the photographs, film the actors, play the instruments and feed him. Admittedly, he does have the Rolls Royce of wheelchairs to get around in, but he still needs to earn enough out of his businesses to buy it.

Doug Richard, well known entrepreneur and ex Dragon, is campaigning to ensure that the UK's £36 billion creative sector gets the recognition and support it deserves. Asta is a film maker, director, actor, speaker and singer that has achieved so much in the creative sector for Britain in not many years; age and years in self-employment that he is living proof of how micro enterprises excel in creativity. Creativity is like enterprise – it is something out of nothing.

Yet, the reason that Governments, the business support sector and the financial sector don't back the Astas of this world as much as other sectors such as technology, is because creativity is all in the head – not on a shelf or e-commerce platform.

Since meeting Asta, I've realised that many of the doll makers, clothes makers, milliners, patissiers, ice-cream makers and chocolatiers that are Enterprise Rockers, are really in the creative sector – their unique products and creative outputs could appear anywhere. All businesses – bakeries, plumbers, shop, cafe and market stall holders – can add creativity to their offer. It makes their micro business unique and it makes the business owner the unique brand.

They sell their products and services against their competition because they make people feel better than the competition makes them feel. Asta is inspirational, Asta is creative and that's what makes what he achieves wanted by paying customers.

It doesn't matter which sector you choose to take your creativity to – it's your ideas that will make your enterprise unique and worthy of customers buying from you. Enterprise Rocks because everyone can be creative – add a little Asta to your business.

For more information visit: [www.enterpriserockers.co.uk](http://www.enterpriserockers.co.uk)

# ENTERPRISE ROCKER

Tony Robinson OBE has lots of things to be excited about at the moment; his new book, 'Freedom From Bosses Forever', numerous speaking events and business 'gigs' plus 2013 welcomes the first birthday of his baby, Enterprise Rockers, an initiative to support the hundreds of micro businesses that need it. Telling us of his many hats, his love of working with women, and what it takes to be an entrepreneur, Tony even reveals some companies he thinks are breaking the mould.

## **So, Tony what have you been up to this year?**

We celebrated one year of the Enterprise Rockers at the beginning of January and it has been all celebrating since. We seem to have many thousands of foodie micro-biz in the Rockers so we're eating and drinking well too. It's one, totally manic but fun round of speaking gigs, media stuff and twisting famous folk's arms to be Head Roadies and Band Leaders.

## **The Enterprise Rockers seems to be your main point of focus. Tell us what you are aiming to achieve.**

It goes back nearly 4 years ago to when I met the fab and glam Tina Boden at a conference we were both speaking at. We realised that we were wasting too much time trying to make Government and Big Companies enterprise friendly and that, anyway, the best people to help micro businesses to succeed were other micro business owners. Tina is young but I'm running out of time to make a difference and thankfully she decided to found the Rockers.

Tina and I worked out, with a large group of business owners, that the fastest way to improve survival rates was to create a massive global, free-to-join-in, self-help community. We're a Community Interest Company and a network of networks making micro-business

owners lives better, wherever they are. We call it 'The Power of Plenty' and we Rock!

## **How can businesses get involved?**

We're informal. You don't have to give us your contact details unless you want to inter-trade, free, with other Rockers or, say, want to go to gigs or receive newsletters or use any of the unique Rockers' offers like Barter place, Speed Mentoring, WinWeb app or the free, Cost Reduction service.

Many start by just following us on Twitter @EnterpriseRocks or participating in our Enterprise Rockers' Facebook and LinkedIn groups. UK micro business owners can find out all the ways to get involved at EnterpriseRockers.co.uk. You can join in to do a little or a lot but everyone is in the Rockers' Band to help each other keep going.

## **Can you tell SYB about your own business background?**

I did post graduate qualifications in HR management. I worked for two US multinationals, finishing as a Managing Director of the UK subsidiary of one. I'd wanted to start my own business by 30 but I was 33 in the end because I enjoyed being wealthy. It's been downhill

**“ALL THE BEST ENTREPRENEURS I’VE MET ARE BRILLIANT AT NEGOTIATING, MAKING DEALS. THERE’S ALWAYS A WIN-WIN WITH YOUR BOSS, JUST THINK WHAT IS HIGH VALUE TO HIM AND LOW COST TO YOU, AND DO A TRADE”**

in wealth since but I wouldn’t swap it for the world and I’m unemployable now. Clare Francis was my first business partner and still is to this day and she’s become my very best friend too. The secret of us still getting on in business, after 25 years, is that we live 200 miles apart.

We’ve mainly specialised in training media development, publishing, direct marketing consultancy and executive negotiating training but we’ve had many business ventures along the way. We’ve been lucky enough to have had famous and dynamic entrepreneurs as clients and we’ve also had some real disasters – I remember a cosmetics company called Sudden Change – it was Sudden Death to us – we lost all of our investment. I also did a piece of work for Lord Sugar many years ago that didn’t achieve what he wanted but he still paid the bill. I think he’s fabulous and his people are really loyal to him – I was chuffed when he won the tribunal case recently. He reminds me of my dad who had his own very successful business - although my dad was clean-shaven, fair, from Yorkshire, supported Hull City and a Methodist.

Clare runs her family’s Commercial Property Business and I have some other business interests too – non exec directorships and I part own a Government funded body called SFEDI which I founded 18 years ago, with FSB, FPB, BBA, CBI, ACCA, BCC, IAB, IoD and others to improve the quality of business support and training for start-ups.

#### **What’s the most interesting aspect of your business life so far?**

I just admire and enjoy meeting and promoting people that make something out of nothing to earn their own living – or as Tim Campbell MBE’s Mum and mine called it – ‘to make ends meet’. As a right show off, I’ve enjoyed speaking to 10,000 business owners at the NEC, organising and hosting enterprise awards at the Bank of England, HMS Belfast, BAFTA, Magic Circle and Kensington Roof Gardens. I’ve had the opportunity of working with lots of my entrepreneur heroes, all over the world, but I enjoy working with the stars, and never to be stars, of tomorrow too.

#### **What do you think the future holds for UK entrepreneurs?**

You’ll probably think I’m crazy but I don’t think it’s a good idea to think in terms of any boundary like a region of the UK. The Rockers are all

business owners and they’re not confined by any boundaries – location, background, education, faith ... whatever. The future is always great for new business owners because we make our own future and sometimes we have to move to wherever we can do the biz.

Many countries are far better than the UK at recognising and supporting micro enterprise but overall it is about individuals making their own way. Being in a supportive network of business owners with the real know-how, know-what and know-who, like the Enterprise Rockers, really helps too.

#### **You’ve recently released your book, Freedom from Bosses Forever. What was the most enjoyable or difficult aspect?**

I think I made it difficult for myself by writing a deliberately funny business book with a story to it. I wanted to make it a page-turner so that the 80 proven enterprise tips were gained by every reader. Fortunately, when it was published in two editions as ‘Stripping for Freedom’ it got fantastic reviews and an entrepreneur hero of mine, Stefan Topfer, CEO of global tech company, WinWeb, said it was the ‘Funniest hard hitting business book that’s full of business truth’. It’s been really enjoyable updating it, improving it and providing many more useful website links and I’m very proud of this new version ‘Freedom from Bosses Forever’.

#### **Can you summarise the concept of the book?**

Freedom from Bosses Forever is funny, fast paced read for everyone interested in enterprise and a ‘must read’ for those thinking of being their own boss. It has left some people ‘snorting with laughter’ but more importantly it pulls no punches in explaining the life changes that must be made in order to successfully prepare for and start a business.

It explains the skills and support needed to succeed and where to get them. It works very well as a Kindle Book and for all e-readers because there are also links to, what I regard, as the most useful websites to help a prospective business owner.

#### **How do you suggest aspirational entrepreneurs handle difficult confrontational situations with their bosses?**

All the best entrepreneurs I’ve met are brilliant at negotiating, making deals. There’s always a win-win with your boss, just think what is high

**“I PREFER HELPING BUSINESS OWNERS; IT'S A RESPECT THING - ANYONE THAT RISKED THEIR OWN MONEY TO START THEIR OWN BUSINESS DESERVES OUR RESPECT AND ALL THE HELP THAT I AND OTHER PEOPLE CAN GIVE THEM TO SURVIVE AND THRIVE.”**

value to him and low cost to you, and do a trade. So it could be that in order for you to do what you want, he or she will be able to let you do that if you give them some contact or some extra hours of work or some leads. Do a trade so that you can do what you want to do.

**You look like you had fun in your photo shoot, what's the meaning of the red hat?**

I love hats; I've got over sixty. We didn't want the Rockers to be all corporate so I started wearing fedoras at Rockers gigs, everything we do at the Rockers has got a band theme, that's why we have band leaders, head roadies, etc. Anyway on all the fedoras I put little red guitars so that they're the 'rockingest' and my favourite is the red fedora.

**You seem to be a lively people person, who have you enjoyed working with the most?**

I've already mentioned people like Tim Campbell MBE, the first The Apprentice winner, Lord Sugar and Gordon Roddick are special but most of my faves are women – I so honestly believe that if women business owners were running the UK we'd all be better off - such as Sarah Anderson CBE, my business partner Clare, Tina Boden and my daughter Sinead.

**So why do you enjoy helping businesses so much?**

I prefer helping business owners; it's a respect thing - anyone that risked their own money to start their own business deserves our respect and all the help that I and other people can give them to survive and thrive.

**If someone has a terrible idea how do you constructively criticise and advise?**

No idea is bad but most ideas can be improved. So I'll ask questions about their idea and nine times out of ten the concerns that I have, they will identify for themselves. Trust me I've had many a bad idea, but what I can do now is work with them to improve what they already have and make it a winner.

**What are the best and worst parts of running a micro-business?**

The best is that it's mine, which means that I am in control of what it does and the worst is exactly that, it's all down to me and that's always a little scary! The important thing is to retain your passion for what you're doing because if you're passionate about what you do you'll be able to keep going through the scary times.

**Are there any new micro-businesses that you think we should look out for?**

Arrrggghhhh...you're asking me a question that'll ensure I upset thousands of Rockers' micro-businesses by not mentioning them! I'll go for three; Razzle Dazzle Vegetarian and Vegan Ices in the South West, Pixie Craft Dolls in Cambridgeshire and the fabulous Khalid Sharif's Ummar Foods that manufacture the most divine chocolate.

**We'll look out for them! What events have you got lined up?**

We've got many events lined up because the Head Roadies in the Rockers are always launching something or other. However, I'm really looking forward to going to an event that our Head Roadie for networks, Mel, organises every September which is a business show for Lincolnshire, South Yorkshire and North Nottinghamshire. It'll be great because Tina Boden and I are both keynote speakers and there's a 'Meet the Rockers' reception which will be a real party of hundreds of Rockers.

**Any final advice that you'd like to share with our readers?**

Most of us that are running our businesses after many years are less interested in business ideas and more interested in where we can get income from. Never be afraid if an idea doesn't work, try it out, improve what does and get rid of what doesn't. If I asked you now to name someone who you see as successful in business I can guarantee you they're not working with the first idea they ever had. They've adapted and changed and made it work and they're still in business now. We think enterprise rocks because everyone has a right to earn their own living and make their own noise!



<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/yourbusiness/10103938/Heres-how-the-Government-can-help-the-micro-business-boom.html>

## Here's how the Government can help the micro-business boom

When I left a director-level job at a UK subsidiary of a US corporate giant in 1986 with my colleague, Clare Francis, to start a micro-business we didn't have a clue what we were doing.

New micro-enterprises provide most new jobs. They do more for their communities than larger companies and their employees are happier.

By Tony Robinson

4:21PM BST 06 Jun 2013

This was despite having post-graduate business qualifications and an award-winning, bank-pleasing business plan. Our adviser was a retired corporate executive – useless. We made £12,000 in our first two years. We're still here.

In 1971, when I went to university, there were fewer than 1m micro-businesses in the UK. Today, there are 4.55m, each of them with nine employees or fewer, and they make up 95pc of all UK business. One in seven working adults is running their own business; by 2020 the number may be as high as one in five.

Around 500,000 micro-businesses start up every year – that's 40pc more than in 2000 – while all other sizes of business have remained static or even fallen.

Large companies have been in a jobs meltdown for many years and the lack of traditional job opportunities, together with a desire to control one's own destiny (my latest Kindle book is called *Freedom from Bosses Forever*) with work hours that suit, in a place that suits, have combined to fuel the micro-business phenomenon.

New micro-enterprises provide most new jobs and most of the innovation and creativity. They do more for their communities than larger companies and their employees are happier, too.

These 4.5m businesses provide 32pc of private sector employment and 20pc of private sector turnover. Micro-businesses are far more important than small and medium-sized enterprises with between 10 and 249 employees.

However, there is no level playing field. The largest companies, year on year, employ less as a proportion of the UK workforce and pay less, year on year, in corporation tax, yet 95pc of all government employment support and training funding goes to the largest 5pc of UK businesses. Moreover, larger companies on average take 68 days to pay their bills – a killer for micro-business.

Lord Young, the Prime Minister's enterprise adviser, and Chuka Umunna, the shadow business secretary, have both publicly recognised the contribution of micro-businesses. This is positive, but whether government "gets" enterprise doesn't matter as much to me as it used to. We're doing our own thing. Call me fickle but fickleness is a family trait. My mother would say she was a "lapsed vegetarian" if she liked the look of the meat course more than her pre-ordered vegetarian option.

Politicians and senior civil servants can't claim any credit for the micro-businesses phenomenon. Few need to learn about it as their career path is usually corporate.

Most micro-business owners are passionate about their products and services, and most go the extra mile to please everyone. They do not like to put their head above the parapet. By inter-trading and collaborating with other micro-businesses their dependence on government and big companies reduces.

But there are some things the Government could do to help. My wish list includes: requiring any beneficiary of public funding to pay suppliers within 30 days; reducing energy costs and business rates; providing free Wi-Fi in public places; assisting business travel; introducing a more informal employment tribunal system; introducing tax incentives so people can try self-employment while in a job.

These are practical steps other countries are taking to create a positive environment for micro-businesses to thrive.

The growth of B2B service businesses, trading platforms, work hubs, apps and competition has made private sector (online and offline) business support low-cost, accessible and effective. It is easier to start a business than it was 10 years ago.

But government start-up support has not improved in those 10 years. Six per cent of all start-ups will become substantial, higher growth, employing businesses. It is in the national interest to increase survival rates.

Some estimates suggest that only 50pc survive the first year and 20pc survive three years. Yet I know that many thousands of start-ups, when given the right support, including test trading, and good filtering of those not ready to start, achieve a survival rate of 80pc after three years.

The private sector can achieve this success rate. Everyone, including those being lured off benefits, deserves professional support, with test trading, for the first 18 months of their enterprise. After 18 months, the business owner will know more than their adviser.

Last year, I co-founded, with Tina Boden, Enterprise Rockers CIC, a massive, free-to-join, global, self-help community. We run our own businesses while helping each other. Our micro-businesses are our passion; a self-help organisation gives us a better chance of surviving and thriving than government, banks or big companies ever will.

Social media and the Enterprise Rockers Community are making micro-business owners increasingly aware of their contribution to the economy. The growth and importance of micro-businesses is a modern phenomenon but, to coin a phrase, you ain't seen nothing yet.

*Tony Robinson OBE has been a successful micro-business owner for more than 25 years and is co-founder of Enterprise Rockers ([www.enterpriserockers.co.uk](http://www.enterpriserockers.co.uk)), which supports micro-enterprises*