

Alan Michael Cleverly OBE
15 September 1948 – 7 March 2016
Eulogy by Cllr John May BA, DIA, FCA
Thursday 31 March 2016 Guildford Cathedral, Surrey

I first met Alan in 1985, when he was seeking sponsorship for Women Into Business, through The Small Business Bureau (SBB) and I was National Marketing Partner for my Chartered Accountancy practice.

He sold me on the idea of getting entrepreneurial business women to meet together in Parliament over lunch with a guest speaker and exchange their ideas about how UK plc should be run for SME's (Small & Medium sized businesses). We as a firm could win from this insight was his 'sales' pitch.

He was way ahead of his time in his vision for what we now call "lobbying with authority". Within months however and after several thousands of pounds of costs from my firm, the entrepreneurial women decided they would like men to be involved as well, so I then became hooked by Alan into Sponsoring SME's in general. And I have never been let off the hook.

In particular, we were involved in all the big SBB Conferences at Lakeside International where we had 1,000 attendees, many of them the great and the good of the day, from politics as well as from a business perspective. Remember this was the time that nobody really promoted the SME case to Government. So, Margaret Thatcher, John Major, Michael Heseltine, Michael Howard, to name but a few, graced our conferences. Compaq, Hewlett Packard, the Daily Mail, DHL and Business Post were the sort of sponsors Alan reeled in. He did it with a relish and enthusiasm that only he had. Never deterred when a sponsor dropped out for any reason, he found another and another. He had that gift for getting money out of businesses even when they were reluctant.

In the SME lobbying groups Alan was legendary. They always asked how he did it and although forthright and helpful with his replies he kept his real powder dry. Everyone knew him not just as a political agent but as a formidable promotor of SMEs.

When the Labour Government came in, Alan's politics didn't waiver nor his drive to promote SMEs at every turn. He formed The Genesis Initiative; a cross-party organisation to promote SMEs, a brilliant invention to ensure that whatever political party was in power they would receive the consensus view of Genesis' members to help in the formulation of policy. Peers and MPs from all sides flocked to support Genesis. At the same time Alan ran the All Party Parliamentary Small Business Group (APPSBG), the All Party Parliamentary Micro Business Group (APPMBG) and the All Party Corporate Governance Group (APCGG), to ensure he covered all angles of influence on SME policy. This was a strategy of excellence of implementation of the SME's shopping list to Government.

In Genesis, on a conservative basis, there are some 120 trade organisations representing some 1.5 million small businesses, say a quarter of all small businesses in the UK. All down to the organisational and cajoling skills of Alan. This will be a part of his legacy.

Today Genesis, under the Royal Patronage of HRH Prince Michael of Kent, presents a manifesto for change that SMEs request from Government. It is a living document that will continue to be presented as it is updated to Government so that the UK remains the best place in the World to start and grow a business. All thanks to Alan Cleverly.

So, I have known Alan since 1985, over 30 years. We have become brothers. We know each other's families and loved ones. When my daughter Lisa died in the Tsunami on Boxing Day 2004 Alan was there first in line to help me, as he has helped so many in his life. He was my first Trustee of the Lisa May Foundation and his help and guidance has meant so much to us all.

We did a bit of sailing together with our families and Alan was there again raising money for good causes on the cruises we went on. On one occasion on our way to St Petersburg in between the numerous glasses of Vodka he arranged an evening for Masons and their widows on board. Complete with gavel and glass bowl to do the raffle, which he brought with him, we raised £1,000 in less than an hour. The ship's captain was amazed. In the two other cruises that month they had only raised £200 in 20 days.

Alan would auction anything he could for charity. I remember, as I am sure a lot of you will, the gallons of whisky, crates of champagne, special bottles of Chablis, one of which was a bit dubious and seemed to come back time and time again as an auction prize. Holidays in Spain and Wales, ski chalets in Switzerland, Alan came up with them all, he was tireless in his charitable work.

He was a Man for All Seasons. I remember campaigning with him when I was trying to get elected as a Borough Councillor. He arrived in a leather jacket and jeans as if he had just got off his motorbike and when he knocked on doors the electorate thought he was a debt collector and assured us of their votes. Formidable would be a word that comes to mind to describe him in this role. He also had a passion for ensuring that his bill postings remained intact and woe betide anyone who tried to take his posters down. He put them up so high that nobody else could reach them. He would even follow rival party candidates around to see that they were abiding by the rules.

I will miss him as you all will. His politically incorrect impersonations, where no offence was intended, will linger long in our memories. He should have been on the stage. His references to his Farmer Giles are legendary; I will say no more.

As I said to Alan on the day before he died "see you on the other side brother, get the place organised for us". He has probably already done that. We have the best constituency in the country and the best lobbying group for SME's there has ever been. All thanks to one Alan Michael Cleverly.

He was a great man, the best we will ever see, our friend and brother. May he rest in peace.