

UNCORRECTED  
SAMPLE

ALEX MALLEY

From suspended schoolboy to disruptive CEO

# THE NAKED CEO



The truth you need  
to **build a big life**

WILEY

# **THE NAKED CEO**

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'When *The Naked CEO* is exposed he turns out to be an incurable optimist, with an insatiable love of life and learning. This is an invaluable handbook for realising your dreams. Leadership takes many forms and Alex Malley pinpoints all the vital ingredients.'

— **The Honourable Richard Alston**

'*The Naked CEO* is an inspirational how-to guide for young people looking to get ahead in business and in life. It's a practical and motivational toolkit that I believe gives our next generation every opportunity for success. I look forward to seeing how these young entrepreneurs change our world for the better.'

— **Mark Bouris**, Yellow Brick Road/Celebrity Apprentice

'As the father of a daughter about to graduate next year I must say that for our family this is a very timely book. Full of insight, wisdom and inspiration, and peppered with anecdotes that bring the lessons to life, it is invaluable guidance for young people about to commence, or in the early stages, of their career journey.'

— **Fayezul Choudhury**, CEO, International Federation of Accountants

'In my experience a vital part of learning is to listen to the experiences and advice of others. Learnings from this together with a good technical education undoubtedly can improve one's performance as a business person and/or professional and also, I might say, as a human being.'

Alex Malley shares with us in *The Naked CEO* the rich veins of a life of an extraordinary communicator and leader. In

an entertaining way he captivates the reader drawing out wonderful lessons for a good life as he extols us to dare to dream, to have confidence, to respect others and to have an ongoing pursuit of the insight of life.

We are lucky Alex has taken the time to write this as I know all of us will be the better for his great stories and advice.'

—**David Gonski AC**

'True to form, Alex leaves nothing off the table about leadership and the realities of the workplace.'

—**David Gyngell**, CEO, Nine Entertainment Co.

'Alex Malley's book is all about helping young people have the courage to be the best they can. I urge them to get a copy and read it.'

—**Greg Medcraft**, ASIC Chairman

'Living life to the best of our ability is probably everyone's dream. *The Naked CEO* provides many insightful shortcuts in the rush to lead a better life.'

—**Helen McCabe**, Editor-in-Chief,  
*The Australian Women's Weekly*

'There are many paths to success in life. Alex Malley shares his own story with unusual honesty and insight, and draws broader lessons from his authoritative interviews with corporate and community leaders. An invaluable roadmap for those aspiring to maximise these career potential and leadership talents.'

—**Susan Pascoe AM**, Australian Charities  
and Not-for-profits Commission

'Alex Malley writes with great clarity, honesty and passion about leadership and life. Whether you agree or disagree with his insights, they'll help you better understand your own challenges and opportunities.'

—**The Honourable Lindsay Tanner**

'A recipe book for success in any field, with practical tips that are easily understood, by someone who has put them into effect with astounding results. Every young person with ambition should read this.'

—**Mark Tedeschi AM QC**



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# PROLOGUE

This book shares the career and leadership principles that I worked out the hard way on my journey from suspended schoolboy to CEO. It's also my challenge to you to go out into the world and test what you are capable of. Dare to throw yourself into experiences. It does not matter if you stumble or fall; we all do. But promise me you will never live your life in fear of failure. I want you to have a big life.

Let's start from my humble beginnings. In my final year of school I was suspended—here is how it happened.

I went to an all-boys school. One day, a friend of mine claimed he had a girlfriend. You have to understand that in the '70s, at an all-boys school, such a claim was pretty big news, and I couldn't just take my friend's word for it—I needed evidence.

Never shy of an adventure, and always keen to disrupt the daily routine, I was only too happy to offer to drive him to the city so we could meet her. So, soon after the lunchtime bell blared, my partner in crime and I, along with a couple of others, were in my bright-orange Datsun confident we'd made a clean getaway.

As it turned out, the girlfriend did exist.

After a few hours of nothing much, for me at least, we decided it was time to get back. So no teachers would see us, we parked at the back of the school, scaled the fence and darted across the rugby fields towards class. The classroom fell silent when we entered. All eyes were fixed on us. Then, with a deadpan delivery, the teacher informed us not to bother finding a seat because the headmaster wanted to see us immediately.

Alarmed, we reluctantly followed orders.

Waiting to be called into the headmaster's office was an excruciating torment. Mr West (the headmaster) let us stew outside for what seemed like at least an hour before eventually calling us in. He then wasted no time in bluntly informing us that we had been spotted sprinting to my car and zooming out of the car park—a teacher had witnessed the entire great escape from his classroom window. I meekly contested that it had not been us, but with my afro hairstyle and orange car I may as well have been wearing a shirt with 'Alex Malley' printed on the back.

Quickly we came to terms with the fact that there was no escape. We had been busted. Mr West handed us our letters of suspension and gestured towards the door with a stiff nod. We could return in ten days. We left the office, devastated.

Immediately my mum came to my mind. She suffered from chronic depression and this sort of stress was something she could definitely do without. But I knew I had to tell her—so I did. She was okay about it, but we did not think my dad would be. So we decided not to tell him. Every day of my ten-day suspension I arrived at the breakfast table dressed

in my school uniform, left at the usual time and returned to the dinner table with pre-prepared tales of what I had learnt at school that day. I didn't tell dad about the suspension until I was 21 and the dust was long settled. Even then he was unimpressed, and fair enough—he deserved better from me.

While this situation was awful at the time, many years on I recount that moment in my life with a level of appreciation. My decision that day, albeit misguided and, ultimately, a big mistake, taught me multiple lessons.

We all make mistakes and it is what we learn from them that matters most. With time on my hands it dawned on me that, living with mum's depression, school and my friends were actually a secure place for me. In those ten days of real isolation, I reflected on the fact that I was wasting a real opportunity. As strange as it may seem, during that time I decided I wanted to become a teacher. I wanted to make the classroom interesting, somewhere students wanted to be. I wrote a note to myself about this and kept it—then and there, I made a commitment to myself.

Many years later, after a number of mistakes and misadventures (some of which I share with you in this book), I walked on stage to receive from the then education minister, Brendon Nelson, a national teaching honour. On the front of my citation was the note I wrote to myself while on suspension.

Some goals take time to achieve. Always remember, you will ultimately reach them if they mean enough to you.

I stayed in touch with Mr West and today he is a friend. He is also never short on advice—even if I don't ask for it! This

shows that in life we never know how things will end up. A momentary combatant became, for me, a lifelong friend. With an open mind, remember anything can happen.

Sadly, I no longer sport the afro, and I imagine my Datsun has long since become scrap metal, but the spirit of stretching the rules, experiencing new things and disrupting routines has never left me. Sure, I am more mature and I have learnt a lot since then but, deep down, I am still that boy.

Staying true to who you are is no easy feat. Working out who you are is even harder. Life is about growth—exposing yourself to different experiences helps you learn more about the world but, more relevantly, about yourself.

Many people feel it necessary to become someone else. I think that is incredibly sad. Much of the essence of who you are, in my view, comes from your earliest years. You should never let the good things go, no matter the environment or circumstance you enter into. Thankfully I know this now, but I think myself lucky to have worked this out, because no-one ever told me this was the case. If someone were to ask me what my biggest regrets are, I would say I don't have many, save for never having had someone to mentor me early in my life and career. Over many years, I worked with a lot of great leaders but they kept their wisdom and insight close to their chests.

So here I am today, a leader, determined to share my mistakes and earned insights. Through my experiences, the good and the bad, I have learnt a few things about professional life and leadership that I want to share with you, one of the next generation, in the hope you might draw something beneficial from them.

Rather than take a small-scale route, I decided to create this book as my investment in the spirit of youth, and offer a complete, no-holds-barred perspective on career progression and leadership. It is not a book of answers. Answers can only come from your own experiences in life. It is not a sugar-coated version of life in the workplace. I would be doing you a major disservice if it was. It is not full of prescribed leadership techniques, because everyone's journey is different and leadership is personal.

This book is a guide. The more open-minded you are, the richer you will find this book.

While you're reading, I encourage you to go back to your earliest memories of what gave you a buzz, what made you excited, what made you feel at home. What was it? Was it the sound of sport? Was it acting in the school play? Was it a book or movie? I ask this of you because our earliest instincts, what made us happy, are a big part of who we are. So as you consider the life ahead of you, promise me you will first go back and answer those questions so you can build on this foundation. Bring yourself back to your instincts—it will help you move forward. Our passions drive us. Let them help to navigate you on your work and life journey. It may take time, but persist.

For me, writing a book is as hard as it gets. Confining myself to one spot for a set period of time is something I have always struggled with. Doing so is pretty much the antithesis of who I am and what I do. But I believe in a leader's responsibility to impart their experience and insight. I put my personal unease aside in the hope that this book guides you along your adventure.

This book traverses the transition from the educational environment to the workplace, right through to being a leader and all that entails. No matter your experience in the workplace or stage of leadership today, you will find something in this book. It is written to stay relevant for you into the future and will provide different insights to you over time as your experiences develop. Whether you're a school or university student, a young professional, your career is in transition, or you are a parent, there is something personal in this book for you.

It is structured under five sections which cover the themes that my experiences indicate will best place you on your leadership journey—from dreaming to finding the leadership role of your dreams.

So what are your dreams?

This book is an extension of The Naked CEO website you may have already visited. To date, over 2 million people have. If you have any questions about your career after reading this book, you can reach me via the Ask Alex section at [thenakedceo.com](http://thenakedceo.com). I will personally respond to your question via video, as I have done for the past two years on the site.

That is my personal commitment to you.



## CHAPTER 4

# INSIGHTS COME FROM EVERYWHERE

As a child, playing with my friends meant a lot more to me than just having fun: it was an escape. This was because my mother suffered from clinical depression. Knowing she was not well was a very hard reality to grow up in.

On one particular day when I was about 13 years old, I was at my mother's bedside in the hospital waiting for her to wake up. Various doctors and nurses came in to check on her, but they didn't talk to me. No-one who appeared to have any sort of rank or seniority said a thing. I guess I had spent so much time there I had become a little like a part of the furniture. But then a cleaner came in to mop the floor. After a short time he caught my eye and smiled as he said something to the effect of, 'You must be Alex. Your mother has told me all about how much she loves you and your brother and sisters. I think your mother is great—you are lucky to have her.' And that was it: he went on his way. But that's all he needed to say.

I have reflected on that memory many times over the course of my life. It was so brief, but so poignant. That gentleman

gave me a sense of my mother and myself. He made me feel comfortable about the difficult circumstance I was in by speaking to me with respect and kindness. And he gave me a renewed appreciation that insight can come from anyone, at any time.

Insight does not always come from someone in a senior position, someone with more experience, someone you would expect. Keep an open ear and mind when it comes to the people you listen to. The more you listen to all of those around you, the better you will become at filtering through the noise to find those nuggets of gold that you can learn from. It comes down to developing a feeling for the environment around you—this is one of the skills you have to develop in your life.

I have learnt to respect all people. It has been a key part of my life and management approach for many years. Respecting people allows you to live within a more positive world where additional insights are gleaned by the other person's comfort in you, because they know you respect them.

Every person in the world has a perspective worth listening to. Insights really do come from everywhere.

Insights from others will provide the stimulus to further develop your own knowledge, ideas, creativity and emotion. The challenge is to create the relationships and circumstances to attract such insights. All around you the opportunity to learn abounds—but are you looking?

## **MAKE IT HAPPEN: HOW TO FIND INSIGHTS**

### **Know that resources abound**

You really can find insights anywhere. Read articles or stories about people and their achievements that you find inspiring. Attend events, watch a documentary or see a movie that excites you and gets your creativity flowing. Think about what made what you have seen or heard so special.

And here is my favourite thing to do: have a different conversation with your parents or friends about their life experiences, and what made them do the things they did in their life.

Speak to the heart—welcome to a whole new world.

### **Be inventive**

Why do some people have great idea after great idea, like it just comes naturally to them? I can tell you, while many of those people are naturally creative, they also possess an ability to absorb like a sponge. This process makes them confident and opportunistic.

A good starting exercise is to take a successful idea you have read or heard about, and then give yourself the creative freedom to write down what you would do to make it even more impactful. This will help create a healthy habit of expanding your mind.

## Capture your ideas

Do you get frustrated because the new ideas that come to you do so at inconvenient times, like in the middle of the night, or when you're at the supermarket or catching public transport? To avoid forgetting them, carry a pad and pen, or have a notes app on your phone, so you can record your ideas any time they arrive.

## Value every environment

I often start a conversation with people I don't know, and I do so in various environments. It might be with the person I'm sitting next to on a plane or at a sporting event, for instance. Sometimes listening to the perspectives or story of someone from outside your day-to-day life can spark fresh inspiration.

While at work, if you're struggling to be creative, change your environment. Find a dedicated space where you are undistracted, or go for a walk to clear your mind and think freely.

## Break down barriers

Try a ten-minute free-writing session about a topic that interests you. Free-writing is where you write down anything that comes into your mind about a particular topic during a set time. Don't read or change anything during the free-writing session—just keep writing until the time is up.

## Hone your observation skills

On many occasions after an important meeting I have asked my colleagues to recount to me what they observed in body language and communication. The reason I do this is because people often speak more clearly through their body movement than they do through their words. Sometimes you have to work hard to observe feelings and obtain insights, rather than hear them.

So start asking yourself why things are the way they are around you. The key to this exercise is asking questions. The more curious you are, the more insights you will absorb, and hopefully the more ideas you will generate.

## Keep in mind not everyone wants to play

I have discovered over time that not everyone is willing to share their personal insights or ideas. Not surprisingly, they may also be uninterested in yours. Learn to recognise that in other people—although I have always tried to make it a personal challenge to influence them to change, because sharing insights between people can build lifelong respect.

## Break bad habits

One of my great frustrations when I taught at universities in large lecture theatres was that everyone sat in the same seat every week. Think about it: you can learn only so much from the person next to you. So, in every setting you find yourself in from this day forth, sit next to someone different and see how much more you learn.

## DON'T FORGET

To get the most from the insights available in your life, remember these tips:

- valuable insights can come from the most unexpected people and places
- consistently listen and observe
- make a note of the insights that have inspired you—it may help you form your own
- be curious—talk to people.

### *Get ahead of the pack*

Here's how to really take advantage of the insights you gather:

- *Find out more:* New ideas are created every day and in some very interesting places. As an exercise, go to well-known company websites and read about the founders and the reasons why they established the business. They often provide very simple and interesting insights.
- *Do it:* Remember, necessity is the mother of invention. If you think you have a great idea for a product or service, a good litmus test is to ask yourself if people really need it. Test that by giving someone you know in business a brief business plan explaining how you'd execute your idea. Testing their insight will be very valuable to you.

### ***Meet the mentee: Shane Prasad***

Shane Prasad was completing the first year of his Commerce and Global Studies degree at Australian Catholic University when he decided that he wanted to pursue his lifelong dream—to work in the aviation industry.

‘I love going to the airport and could sit there for hours looking at the planes fly and land’, said Shane. ‘People there are always excited. The fact that so many different cultures from around the world come together at the airport excites me. Planes allow us to visit our loved ones and to explore the world. I want to be a part of this industry that allows people to go wherever their hearts desire.’

The problem, however, was that he had no idea where to start. How could he get a foot in the door of such a highly competitive profession?

Shane visited The Naked CEO website to seek advice by asking Alex a question. Alex responded with a personal video answer that encouraged Shane to immerse himself in the aviation world. Alex advised Shane to seek out aviation-focused hobby groups that attract people who are passionate about aviation as well as people who work in the industry. This would provide insights into the industry and also help him to build relationships with key people in the sector. Alex also encouraged Shane to write a personal letter to the major airlines, offering his voluntary service.

'Offering to volunteer in particular areas is generally well received, and people want to teach you things, they want to nurture and mentor', said Alex. 'So your job is to get in there and to start talking to people in that world and things will flow from that.'

Since receiving Alex's advice, Shane transferred into the university course of his dreams—Aviation Management at the University of New South Wales. To augment his studies, he has also joined the Australian division of the Royal Aeronautical Society, where he networks with other professionals in aviation. What is most pleasing to Alex is that he has also applied to be a student mentor at his university in the hope of developing some new leadership skills.

Shane says that the next step in his career path is to gain industry experience through internships from various airlines so he can gain further insight. Acknowledging that industry experience is the key to finding employment in this competitive field, Shane plans to apply for a graduate program at either Qantas or Virgin Airlines once he finishes his degree.

'Alex told me that if I want something, it's up to me to get out there and find the opportunities available. My dream is to be a leader in the aviation industry, so from now on I'll just be working up to that and grabbing any opportunities with both hands', Shane said.

# CONCLUSION

## A BIG LIFE

I do recall with a smile the beginning of The Naked CEO journey when people told me, 'Alex, you're a CEO, not a teacher anymore'.

You can never stop being a teacher. It is the core responsibility of a leader. The issue today, at least in my mind, is that we talk a lot about mentoring and teaching but it's not matched by action in the business world.

This book is a promise I made to myself when I first sat in a lecture theatre at university, wondering how I was possibly going to move from the class to this thing called 'the real world'. It took me a long time to master 'the real world' and I could have done with some help. This book is designed to guide and shorten your mastery journey.

It is okay to dream about a big life—one that is lived on your terms, breathes your passion and inspires others. That big life, however, does not come easy. It requires unstinting resolve, persistence and a willingness to suck it up along the way. Whether during the tough moments, or the exhilarating ones, always stay true to you. I want you to promise me that

when you get to your mountain top that nothing is different about you that your friends or family can see, other than you are a lot wiser for your journey.

Make every mistake count and force yourself to laugh in the toughest of times. I promise, everything eventually seems smaller than it did at the time. Earn your confidence, nurture it, then help to build it in others. Do not abandon it when others (rightly or wrongly) lose a little faith in you. You can always rebuild relationships by maintaining an open and positive mind.

Unless you're comfortable with your own journey, you're unlikely to truly help others on theirs. In some ways you've got to be selfish before you can be truly generous. Often you can only be of real benefit to others when you understand your own true value. The aim is to be comfortable in your own skin. It's a worthwhile ambition.

Be willing to ride the roller-coaster that is your journey with a white-knuckle grip and a courage to fail in getting there. It took me too long to commit to my journey and I challenge you to be faster and better than me in owning your adventure. This book is my commitment to helping you along the way.

And I meant what I wrote in the prologue—if you have any questions about your career after reading this book, contact me via the Ask Alex section at [thenakedceo.com](http://thenakedceo.com) and I will personally respond via video.

Now go and find your big life.

# ABOUT ALEX MALLEY

Alex Malley FCPA is the CEO of CPA Australia and is responsible for 19 offices globally and 150 000 members in 121 countries.

Alex was born in Sydney, Australia, to immigrant parents. From the time he and his family remember, he was a disruptive boy—always curious about everything around him.

His life and career have been extremely diverse with experiences that include banking, sports management, university lecturing, media commentary as well as CEO, board director and chairmanship roles.

Tackling leadership and mentoring matters is something he has always taken very seriously. As host of the television series *The Bottom Line*, screened nationally on the Nine Network Australia, Alex brings these issues into sharp focus through interviews with fellow leaders from business, politics and the community. The interview he conducted with the first man on the moon, Neil Armstrong, was the most substantive ever filmed. News surrounding it reached an unprecedented global audience.

Alex fronts CPA Australia's online mentoring community for students, thenakedceo.com. Approximately 2 million young people have visited the site to date. The extraordinary engagement achieved on the website was the inspiration behind his book—*The Naked CEO: The Truth You Need to Build a Big Life*.

He writes a regular blog for *The Huffington Post* and is a business commentator on the nationally syndicated programs *The Money News* on 2GB and *Sky News Business*.

Alex serves on a number of councils, boards and government sector committees including the Prince of Wales' Accounting for Sustainability Project and the International Integrated Reporting Council domiciled in London.

In recent times, Alex was invited to become a LinkedIn Influencer: an exclusive group of global leaders, which includes the likes of Richard Branson, Bill Gates and US President Barack Obama. Via regular blog posts, Alex shares his leadership insights with LinkedIn's network of more than 300 million professionals around the globe.

From suspended schoolboy to CEO, Alex has always done what he believes in.

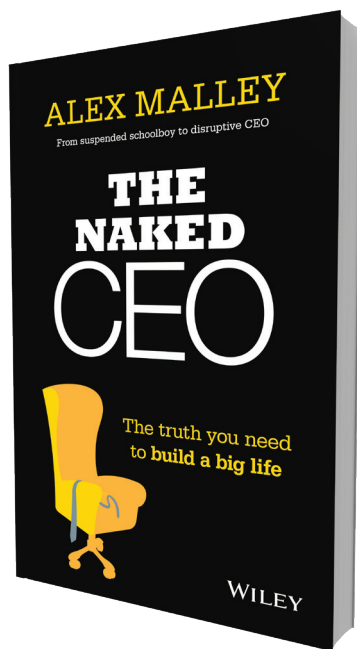
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by Alex Malley



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**'We are lucky Alex has taken the time to write this as I know all of us will be the better for his great stories and advice.'**

**David Gonski AC**



From suspended schoolboy to disruptive CEO, Alex Malley has led a life rich in success and mistakes. Through it all he has learned a lot about what it takes to successfully build not only a big career, but also a big life—the secrets of which he shares in this book. Alex's powerful life stories and practical advice make this a must read for students, jobseekers and professionals thinking about their next career move.

**With intriguing stories and outstanding advice, this is a book every young professional should have on their desk. Learn from a CEO who's lived it.**

- **CEO of CPA Australia**
- **Award-winning educator**
- **Parent of seven**
- **Television host**
- **LinkedIn™ Influencer**

**Pre-order at [thenakedceo.com/thebook](https://thenakedceo.com/thebook)**



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