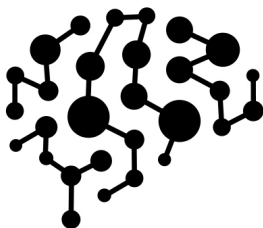


ONE GOLDEN NUGGET



**HOW TO
SURVIVE
AND
THRIVE
VOLUME III**

**JOE FOSTER, FOUNDER OF REEBOK,
RETURNS WITH POWERFUL NEW STORIES OF
RESILIENCE AND INNOVATION, CHANGING THE
WORLD ONE PAGE AT A TIME.**

Joe Foster



JONATHAN FITCHEW

Group CEO at Apprentify Group Ltd

When I learned that after losing his long-time partner and best friend, Jonathan felt a deep sense of trepidation about continuing his business ventures alone, it struck a chord with me. When my brother Geoff passed away, half the business vanished with him, leaving me to make every decision on my own. Losing the ability to bounce ideas off each other changes everything about how you move forward. Yet, despite the immense personal and professional losses we faced, we both found our footing again, and our businesses thrived in the wake of tragedy.

Before the age of seven, Jonathan had already travelled across the world. As the son of an RAF pilot commissioned in Scotland, then stationed in Cyprus, and later transferred to Singapore, his early childhood was shaped by constant movement and exposure to diverse cultures. As a very young child at the time, his most vivid memory of that time is returning to the UK, and seeing snow. He explains, “I had never worn shoes before because I had been in all these wonderful countries.”

Like many children of military parents, Jonathan attended boarding school, an experience he recalls with loathing. Having spent his early years in warm climates, playing rugby in the cold was nothing short of miserable. It was during this time that Jonathan was first exposed to the lifestyles of the wealthy. Watching parents pull up in “Aston Martins and Rolls-Royces” to drop off their children presented a stark contrast to his modest upbringing. He reflects, “It gave me my first glimpse of success and privilege, and I hated not being part of it.” It was then that the seed was planted.



His school life worsened when he was moved to a larger, more “archaic” school, which led him to come up with a plan to get expelled and return home. During a school trip to London, he purposely missed the bus back, spending the night wandering the streets until the police found him and took him home. His plan worked. Looking back on the event, he says, “It was brilliant. I went to the local school where girls and boys went home each day, and I absolutely thrived.”

Jonathan excelled in his A Levels and went on to study economics at UCL in London. He fell in love with the vibrant, bustling city of the early eighties, full of opportunity, new ideas, and an entrepreneurial spirit that would shape his career. After graduating, he secured a job selling phone systems for the American company General Electric before moving on to a small telecoms business. By the age of twenty-two, he had risen to the role of sales manager, and after securing a substantial bank loan, he purchased shares in the company and was soon promoted to sales director.

Over the next few years, the company expanded significantly, reaching a £5 million turnover. However, in an era where communication was limited to face-to-face meetings or phone calls, ensuring clients paid their bills was a constant challenge. It was at this stage that he learned, “Cash is king.”

By the time Jonathan was twenty-eight, frustrated with being a minority shareholder and having no control over the company’s direction, he sold his shares for what would be equivalent to a decent six figures today. With time on his hands and money in the bank, Jonathan made some poor business decisions, losing everything when he invested in a telephone advertising firm whose parent company producing the adverts went bankrupt. He had learned another valuable lesson: “Not to rush into something, and take time to reflect.”



“Quitters never win.”



Drawing on his experience of leading a team of salespeople, Jonathan realised, “Just because somebody says they’re experienced doesn’t mean that experience is necessarily good.” Determined to start his own business, he was adamant that his future employees would have limited experience, believing that a fresh perspective and a willingness to learn were far more important. In 1995, he co-founded his staffing and recruitment business, Pareto Law, with his best friend, Andy. They specifically sought out individuals who were “tenacious, courteous, open-minded, and hard-working.” He had come to understand that while skills could be taught, personality traits were innate and could not be learned.

The business was thriving until Jonathan discovered that his finance manager had mistakenly double-billed the factoring company, resulting in a significant debt. Although it took time to resolve, Jonathan eventually repaid the money, but not without learning another important lesson: “Be mindful of who is writing your cheques and controlling your money.” The issue could have spelled the end for the company but with profound pride and a deep commitment to what they had built, the co-founders and their team pushed forward, determined to overcome the setback and win the war.

Their perseverance paid off, and in 2005, Pareto Law won *The Sunday Times* Small Business of the Year award. Jonathan reflects, “It was one of the proudest moments of our lives.” The company continued to thrive, but

was sold “far too soon,” according to Jonathan. He and his partner were retained and managed to triple the size of the business, only to see the rewards go to someone else who reaped all the benefits by buying a company in the midst of rapid growth. During this time, the company placed over 25,000 graduates in jobs.

When Andy died of a brain tumour during the COVID-19 pandemic, Jonathan was faced with the challenge of building a new enterprise on his own. He founded Apprentify, a company that trains digital and technical apprentices. The journey, he explains, has been “cathartic because I never felt I could do this without him by my side.” After four years, Jonathan employs 250 people, and the company enjoyed a £25m turnover in 2024/ 2025.

Jonathan reflects on his father’s influence, which taught him the importance of treating people with respect, saying, “If you care for the people you work with, you treat them as equals and give them vision.” He lives by this principle, notably doubling his employees’ pay over three years. Jonathan is also proud that his company trains 6,000 individuals, many from disadvantaged backgrounds in the West Midlands, in digital skills.

As a hugely successful entrepreneur, Jonathan views business as a “game that makes the world go round.” He adds, “If you get it wrong and lose, then you live in a smaller house and drive a smaller car.” Although he’s experienced some failures, much of what Jonathan has touched in business has made a significant impact on customers, candidates, and the community. His five digital training companies, Netcom, Apprentify, The Juice Academy, Flourish, and Ioda, are all growing “incredibly” by offering “unbelievable digital skills.”



**“Timing is really
important in business.”**

Specialising in training young people, Jonathan suggests that learning new digital skills is more important than maths or English because “the world is changing at such a fast pace that the traditional school curriculum isn’t fit for the purpose of today’s workforce.” His advice to Gen Z is to spend less time on their devices and invest in your communication skills. His advice to all is to “get an idea, execute it, and then go on the journey.”

He believes businesses should support their employees with training and personal development. As an advocate for apprenticeships, he asserts they provide individuals with “specific skills for employment.” He also recognises the rapid evolution of training and apprenticeships, particularly in the creation of new topics. For instance, he compares content creator apprenticeships, noting they offer “more up-to-date” skills and knowledge than graduates pursuing a “generic university degree” in the same field.

By offering twelve- and eighteen-week courses, Jonathan suggests that learners can gain “a burst of knowledge in a short period of time.” With “curated, produced, and developed subject matter that is easy to absorb and acquire,” he describes the process as “snippet learning,” which he believes can be truly “powerful.” As an example of this, Netcom recently trained 100 students on “the first government-sponsored digital boot camp with an AI for the workplace emphasis.”



For Jonathan, AI represents the “new industrial revolution.” Rather than fearing it, he embraces its potential to be “good for humanity.” As a digital educator, he encourages us to “take it on board,” viewing AI as a tool that “removes the mistakes that can come from human interaction.” As a practical example of how “we can all thrive,” he points to AI agents that will answer the phone for local councils, immediately identifying the caller, speaking in their own language, and addressing any questions. The technology is so advanced that most users never realise they’re not speaking with a human, and feedback has been positive because people aren’t put on hold and have their queries answered quickly.

Looking at the future of digital learning, Jonathan suggests that every organisation should have an in-house digital learning designer to curate their own specific training. Although all his training packages are online, he envisages classroom training making a bit of a comeback as people miss that face-to-face interaction that Gen Z really needs.





**“You curate yourself
through relationships.”**



Regarding the future of tech, Jonathan suggests Britain is “right up there with the best of them.” Being the third-biggest contributor in digital technology, “whether in MedTech, or biological enhancement with drug therapies and computers,” Britain is making significant strides. Data analytics and cybersecurity are two fields beginning to gain traction as more businesses seek to train their employees. Government expenditure on apprenticeship schemes is seeing results, with businesses taking advantage of the levy offered and training employees in sectors such as hospitality, retail, IT, digital, and more.

With his hands-on experience, Jonathan is well-qualified to dispute the claim that the UK lacks skills. He’s really proud of the workforce that’s evolving in this country but believes that, due to the “changing landscape,” the school system isn’t adapting quickly enough. It’s not necessarily all about tech; he also believes that financial, personal, and health management should be part of the curriculum.

Additionally, he advocates for experts to visit schools to provide career advice about roles many people may not understand, aiming to “open kids’ eyes so they know what is out there.” The issue, he suggests, stems from league tables, with schools being too “obsessed with getting people to university.” Jonathan even shares his frustration at being pushed back after offering to speak at schools about the benefits of apprenticeships. Another one of his businesses, Juice Academy, provides such mentoring, where industry veterans meet in the classroom, talk about specific skills, and share their experiences.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the success of Jonathan’s online businesses, he believes it negatively impacted many young people, who developed “a fear of connecting with people.” To address this, he ensures that new young employees begin their journey together, starting on the same day and meeting face-to-face in a classroom setting. Each group is assigned a coach and development mentor, who establishes a culture of fun, sets clear expectations, and trains them in essential communication skills. After two weeks, they feel like they are part of a team and integrated into the culture of the business.

As the father of twin boys, William and Charles, Jonathan has seen the trials and tribulations of growing up today. While one son thrived at university and is now completing a master’s degree in Australia, the other tried further education but felt it wasn’t for him, preferring to work in Jonathan’s business, where he has excelled.

Although part of him still yearns for the warmer climate and envisions sitting in a villa under the sun at some stage, Jonathan loves his job too much to give it all up just now. With five relatively young and expanding companies, he sees his immediate future as very busy. However, he still finds some spare time to continue with his passion for music. As a musician and songwriter, Jonathan has performed in pubs, playing the piano and keyboard. He also enjoys cooking and walking his dogs, as well as being an avid follower and collector of contemporary art.

As a seasoned entrepreneur, Jonathan has learned many valuable lessons along the way and understands that setbacks are an inevitable part of the journey. However, it’s how you respond to them that determines your ultimate success. By staying open to new ideas, learning from failures, and continually evolving, he has maintained a forward-thinking approach in a field that creates opportunities for young people, empowering them with skills that will ultimately benefit both their futures and society as a whole.



**“Leverage is one of the great
wonders of the business world.”**



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AND
THRIVE







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