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Interviews with Entrepreneurs

Alexander Stein, Ph.D. – Founder of Dolus Counter-Fraud Advisors

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Please share with us what prompted you to launch Dolus Counter-Fraud Advisors, LLC?

My establishment of Dolus has been a professional evolution more than the product of a discrete decision. How I came to develop this business is best understood by tracing a sequence of pivotal inflection points (each of which is in reality far more complex than I can concisely describe here).

I hold masters and doctoral degrees in psychoanalysis, and completed my clinical training and licensing at The National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis in New York. I pursued excellence and success with intense dedication, worked to grow my private practice and help

The Young Adult's Blueprint For Success



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my patients, and established my reputation as a respected clinician/scholar/teacher/lecturer. I wrote and published many articles in prestigious peer-reviewed journals, and presented at international conferences. All of it was compelling and gratifying.

But I was also frustrated by a cluster of issues. One is the traditional private practice business model: a referral system. I felt stymied by having to wait for the phone to ring with a potential new patient, irrespective of all the other business development actions I took.

More fundamentally vexing: psychoanalysis, as a part of the larger mental health industry, was continually being mischaracterized, maligned, and marginalized, in the general press, by rival therapeutic modalities (e.g., cognitive behavioral therapy, psychiatry, psychopharmacology), and in the market-place of popular culture, where mental health issues and treatment suffer from persistent social stigma. I was perturbed by what I considered an insufficient engagement by the profession—the body of practitioners and administrators of training institutions—to staunchly respond to and redress these brand assaults. I mounted my own campaign, primarily through writing letters to the editor in the *New York Times* designed to correct and clarify misperceptions about the contemporary relevance and value of psychoanalysis. Quite a few were published over time. But there was, not surprisingly, no measurable impact on the larger problems. I had, just the same, honed the useful skill of articulating complex ideas in lean, accessible language.

Then: September 11, 2001. My wife and I lived across the street from the World Trade Center towers. She was pregnant with our first child and at [home \(http://beyondsuccessonline.com/\)](http://beyondsuccessonline.com/) that morning. Thankfully, she survived unscathed. But our apartment was ruined; we were homeless and did not relocate until December of that year. Our baby was born that April. In the scheme of horrific events, we were of course among the extremely fortunate. We had only lost material things, all replaceable.

Still, nothing was the same. What had before seemed confounding but tolerable professional frustrations now had a different, more urgent cast. Being the parent of an infant in the post-9/11 world, having been directly impacted by the event itself, and both witnessing and experiencing how American society was reacting, catalyzed another shift for me.

The thought coalesced that I could not remain working solely as a clinical practitioner, treating individual patients struggling with their life's challenges. However important and satisfying that work is, I now identified myself in different terms: as a social entrepreneur.

I positioned myself to make a broader impact through focusing my specialized expertise on the psychological underpinnings of leadership, corporate culture, and organizational governance. And consequently launched a process of rebranding and redirecting my preferred practice area to advising CEOs, entrepreneurs, corporate boards, and senior business leaders whose decision-making inside their organizations has significant influence on commerce and society. At this time, I was also invited into the Boswell Group, a consulting firm focusing on the psychology of business. To further expand the scope of my influence as a thought leader, I navigated to becoming a monthly columnist—writing on the psychology of leadership and entrepreneurship—in *Fortune Small Business* and on *CNN/Money.com*. Contributing to top-tier business publications is now a regular part of my professional activities.

In early 2010, I got an email from an old friend I hadn't seen in many years who is one of the world's foremost fraud and asset recovery lawyers. He'd read my work in *FSB* and suggested that I would be uniquely positioned to add value to his field. Fraud is fundamentally predicated on the manipulation of human psychology: fraudsters induce victims to become unwittingly deprived of dominion over substantial sums of their own money or other valuable assets through deceit, artifice, sharp practice, or breach of confidence. Traditional fraud recovery professionals (certified fraud examiners, forensic analysts, investigators, and litigators) routinely confront these complex psychological issues in their work. It had become apparent that it is suboptimal—and, at core, a strategic disadvantage—for these professionals to rely on general human experience, as lay people, in navigating such inscrutable terrain.

In the challenge presented to me—what could I offer to fraud-fighting professionals?—I immediately saw peerless opportunity. This sparked the development and formation of *Dolus Advisors*. I responded with the beta architecture of cutting-edge perspectives and innovative, strategic methodologies regarding the psychological dimensions of fraud and fraudsters, coupled with actionable deliverables which measurably assist in virtually all facets of a fraud case. I continually refine and expand my technology in the crucible of in-the-field case work, and through writing and speaking internationally to fraud, asset recovery, corporate corruption, and AML professionals.

Tweets

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[Business Services \(/category/business-services/\)](#) (21)
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[Consulting \(/category/consulting/\)](#) (14)
[Cornell U. Student Entrep \(/category/cornell-u-student-entrep/\)](#) (2)
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[Culture \(/category/culture/\)](#) (4)
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[Fashion \(/category/culture/fashion/\)](#) (9)
[fraud \(/category/fraud/\)](#) (1)
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[image development \(/category/image-development/\)](#) (2)
[inspiring lives \(/category/inspiring-lives/\)](#) (1)
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Following the initial launch of Dolus, I also recognized additional market potential, and expanded services into corporate fraud deterrence/avoidance, institutional risk management, and fraud-related organizational triage.

There is no typical day in the life of an entrepreneur. Please share with us a sample of your day, start to finish.

I'm up at 5:15 and in my office by 6:30, except for one morning a week which is reserved for making breakfast for my kids and walking them to school. There are always emails to respond to, or early meetings and phone calls. Many of the fraud matters I'm engaged with involve multi-national teams, so it's common to accommodate colleagues' schedules in far-flung time zones. I'm frequently shuttling to and from my NY-based consulting clients' offices on Wall St and Midtown, as well as meetings in my office. I always have several conference presentations to prepare for, as well as current and on-deck writing projects; time spent thinking about or drafting text is a daily activity. Physical fitness is of paramount importance to me. And I aim to be home for dinner with my family most nights.

What are your 'can't live without' Smartphone or desktop applications?

My work centers on interacting with people so I primarily use my phone for talking, emailing, and texting. Other than Docs-to-Go (the iOS Word/Adobe platform for writing and reading documents), the apps I rely on the most are Pocket Informant for scheduling and task-management and DropBox for document sharing.

What are your tricks for time management?

I'm extremely focused and disciplined (a classical musician in my earlier career, I developed rigorous practice habits from an early age). That helps. But managing time well is a skill, not a trick. One piece includes effectively navigating a constantly fluctuating calculus of competing forces: task and duration, time and resources, requests and commitments, expectation and reality, all in context. Another less obvious element is psychological: understanding your relationship to the activity or its outcome. Ambivalence, conflict, or unacknowledged disinclination is frequently an invisible source of friction lurking behind the apparent reasons for being disorganized. Conversely, unencumbered passion is a terrific motivator.

What was the best advice you received when you started your career?

Not to restrain myself out of concern about other people being disrupted by what I can do: be all of myself.

Given the current economic climate, what has been your strategy for building awareness of Dolus Counter-Fraud Advisors, LLC? (what you do for short term and long term growth)?

Fraud is a growth industry. And the human element is inescapably crucial to visionary leadership—in corporate governance, policy-making, commercial stewardship, or in the aftermath of wrong-doing (such as fraud).

My core competencies involve clarifying, decoding, and accessibly articulating the complex underpinnings of motivation and behavior, rendering sophisticated analyses of the ecosystems of human inter-relationships in organizations and in fraud matters, enhancing thoughtful high-level leadership performance, and providing specialized knowledge of the mind and its propensities.

None of that is directly linked to undulations in the economy. In my assessment, then, marketing, building brand awareness, and general business development pivot primarily on my own skills and performance as a thought leader and specialist practitioner, more than external factors.

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[Marketing Equation \(/category/marketing-equation/\)](#) (1)
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[This Month's Posts \(/category/this-months-posts/\)](#) (4)

What is your proudest achievement as an accomplished entrepreneur?

My sense of pride regarding my professional life always has at least two sides. One is focused on what I'm able to accomplish for my clients. The other is personal: my own evaluation of what I've done and how well. There is no one accomplishment I would single out.

How do you achieve balance in your life?

Through lots of hard work of various kinds. The payoff is that I'm in a privileged spot: I've created businesses using my talents and interests which are rewarding to me in every way, provide services of importance and value to others, and which also, I hope, contribute something positive and beneficial to the world. I have an incredible family, outstanding health, and good friends. The thing with balance is that it's never static and the "achievement" of it can only be transitory. Learning how to respond reasonably well to all the fluctuations—staying more or less balanced when some things are out of balance—is a natural part of a good life.

Your top 3 book recommendations?

For fiction: anything by Thomas Hardy or Charles Dickens. I'm generally not a fan of business books, which tend in the main to compress and over-simplify complexity in order to appeal to more readers. There are no lists of recipes or how-to's for success except perhaps writing a best-seller based on lists of recipes and how-to's. More applicable are obituaries; these are an unparalleled resource for learning about resilience, high-level decision-making, and long-range responses to early life experiences characteristic of notable world figures.

What are your most rewarding charitable involvements?

A primary tenet of my business is to be of help. In keeping with this core value, I always reserve time to work, either pro bono or on deeply discounted retainers, with the leaders of NGO's and NFP's whose missions focus on social good.

For readers interested in learning more about charitable giving through acts of service rather than deep-pocketed philanthropy, see my FastCompany article on the psychology of generosity: <http://www.fastcoexist.com/1681561/the-5-most-generous-on-wall-street#5>.

Who has influenced your career the most?

My wife is at the top of a substantial list of generous, talented people I've been privileged to know.

What is your advice for someone interested in entrepreneurship?

The most useful advice is always tailored to the specific circumstances of the person (or organization) asking for it. So I typically don't randomly dispense it. That being said, my advice to both aspiring entrepreneurs as well as already established leaders, is to always be deeply thoughtful about any advice you receive. And also to bear in mind that the best advice won't always actually come from somebody else; having someone who serves as a confidential sounding board can assist you in clarifying good counsel for yourself.

About Alexander Stein

I am an internationally established thought leader and specialist practitioner in the psychology of fraud, and a business psychoanalyst whose preferred practice area involves advising CEOs, established entrepreneurs, and senior business leaders on the psychological underpinnings of leadership, corporate culture, and organizational governance.

As Founder and Managing Principal of Dolus Counter-Fraud Advisors, I partner with asset recovery litigators and investigators on behalf of the victims of fraud. My conceptual and methodological innovations include strategic psychodynamic intelligence interpretation and analysis, multi-dimensional perspectives on legal, investigative, and asset tracing and recovery tactics, organizational procedures and operations, human performance matters, and case management.

In addition, Dolus provides cutting-edge resources to corporate leaders and boards in situations involving institutional fraud and corruption, including: Fraud/Corruption/Integrity Risk Assessments, Human Performance Audits, Psychodynamically-oriented Intelligence Investigation and Analysis, Profiling, Forecasting, Model-Building, Motivation/Behavioral Analysis, and Tactical Response Plans.

I am also is a Principal in the Boswell Group, a consulting firm focusing on the psychology of business. My approach is designed help senior executives and their organizations with, for instance, leadership and senior team dynamics, succession, partnership, conflict resolution, and innovative development initiatives.

I am a former monthly columnist for Fortune Small Business, CNN/Money.com, and BNET/CBS Business News. My work has been featured in many blue-chip publications, and I keynote regularly at international fraud & asset recovery and trans-border bankruptcy cooperation conferences. My chapter "Warfare of the Mind: The Psychology of Fraud" is forthcoming in the FraudNet World Compendium of Asset Tracing and Recovery, 2nd Edition.

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