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Written by Alan Sugar

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What You See Is What You Get:
My Autobiography

ALAN SUGAR

The Way I See It

RANTS, REVELATIONS AND RULES FOR LIFE

PAN BOOKS



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Warning:
This Book May Cause Offence

I've always been regarded as someone who speaks his mind. You probably know that already. Hopefully it's why you bought this book – because you like my straight talking. If someone bought it for you as a present and you're thinking, 'Who *is* this Sugar fellow?', then I should explain that this book contains opinions that may cause offence – especially to certain members of the press, the government and *The Only Way Is Essex*. Also restaurateurs, advertisers, flying bores, footballers and maybe Piers Morgan, although, knowing him, he'll see it as complimentary.

I don't know where this need to speak my mind comes from – my parents weren't the same way – but basically I cannot stand listening to people talking a load of rubbish. I can't resist butting in and saying, 'That's complete and utter nonsense.'

On the other hand, there are times when maturity has taught me to think, 'Keep your mouth shut, Alan. Yes, they *are* talking a load of bollocks, but can you be bothered to correct them?' I find this particularly to be the case when someone says something completely and utterly factually wrong. I kind of switch off; I think to myself, 'Who cares? Let them get on with it.' The problem is that if I adopt this silence when someone is spouting off wrong information about me or anything I'm involved in, the person spouting it will think that he or she is correct and will go on to dine out on it, repeating it several times as a fact cast in concrete.

It does make me laugh when you hear people with no actual inside information give their personal opinion – say, on a news

story or famous person – telling you what's really going on. They come up with their own crazy ideas and theories, and when they get into wacky world, that's normally when I jump in. I've got some friends who insist that Princess Diana is still alive; it was all a plot to get her out of the limelight. Depending on how much they've had to drink, they might change their story to: 'Okay, she may not be alive, but she was *definitely* murdered by the Queen and Prince Philip, no question about it.' And these people are always so intent on their belief.

These same people, whose names I won't mention, said, following the announcement of the death of Bin Laden, '*He's* not dead. It's all a PR stunt by the Americans. He's still alive,' and all that kind of stuff. With their imaginations, these people would be very good at writing detective stories and thrillers.

Speaking my mind has got me into hot water on occasion, and I've upset people. My wife and some of my work colleagues are still amazed when I get involved in some controversy or other. We'll be in a conversation and I'll interrupt, telling someone they're talking a lot of rubbish. Ann will ask me later, 'Why do you bother? Why can't you resist it? Why can't you just shut up and let it go by?'

I really don't know the answer to that, other than to say that I don't care what other people think about me. I only concern myself with my immediate family, friends and work colleagues, and what *they* care about. I'm not particularly interested in portraying a goody-goody image – a Mr Nice Guy who says the right thing at the right time just to get people on his side; to get them to admire him; to say they like him. Frankly, I find that pathetic, and I've seen so many examples of it over the years. These people actually make me cringe when I see them grovelling, trying to put on this nicey-nicey persona. People have to take me as they find me because, as I've often said, what's on my lung is on my tongue.

The only thing I would say is that the first time people meet me, they do tend to have a preconceived idea of what I'm like from what they've read about me or from having seen me on TV. When I was chairman of Tottenham Hotspur, the sports media was negative and full of lies. Similarly, on *The Apprentice*, the production company cuts the film in a certain way to make me look aggressive, as it suits their agenda. I've often heard people say once they've got to know me, that they understand what makes me tick. But in general I have no desire to suck up to anyone or seek their friendship or support. This has not just been in recent years – since I've become more well known – I've always been the same. I just can't bear having to be false – talking to someone just to get something out of it, financially or socially. If you want new friends and associates, they should be just that – genuine friends and associates.

Straight talking, that's me, and I like people who are also straight talking. I like people who, if they don't know something, will say, 'I don't know – I'll go and find out and get back to you.' There's nothing worse than hearing some bullshitter trying to waffle his or her way around a situation when all you've done is ask them a simple question. I can see through it immediately and can tell that they haven't got a bloody clue what they're talking about. So why do these people do it? I suppose it's all to do with ego and them wanting to give the impression they know everything.

In fact, because I've got such a good memory, I sometimes wrongly assume that people I employ or deal with remember things in the same level of detail as I do. I used to get quite frustrated when I'd ask them a question about something and they didn't know what I was referring to. Now, as I've mellowed a little, I'll put my question in a different way. I'll say to them, 'You'll find some information in the such and such file about this or that transaction – can you let me know the exact number of items we shipped and

get back to me?' So you see, I've learnt to become a little more tolerant. That said, if someone asked me a question like that, I'd most probably be able to rattle off the number straight away, or have a bloody good guess at it.

Another thing that annoys me is what I call the 'Basil Fawlty effect', when people schmooze and act politely to someone like me (maybe because there's an angle in it for them or they want something from the boss), and then you observe them with a less senior employee and they're talking to them as if they're a piece of rubbish. We all remember how Basil used to do that when he thought he had an influential guest arriving at his hotel – he would suddenly go into his over-polite, grovelling mode, then as soon as the person went away and one of his workers spoke to him, he'd go back to his normal arsehole self. Well, there are people in real life like that and I detest them, particularly the sort who try to affiliate themselves with me. They'll say, 'Of course, Alan, people like you and I understand these things, but as for the others – don't expect them to grasp it.'

Those people come close to getting a whack from me – they really wind me up. I normally say to them, 'Actually, you're nothing like me,' and it shuts them down pretty quickly. Put simply, I can't stand snobs who think they're a cut above other people and look down on them.

I'm amazed at how many so-called old 'friends' and 'acquaintances' I have. Ann always smiles when someone I know says to me, 'I met an old mate of yours the other day. He told me to send his regards.'

Now, I don't know what it is, but I have this kind of sixth sense that the next thing coming out of this person's mouth is going to be a name I've never heard before.

'Oh yes?' I say. 'Who is that then?'

'Charlie Saunders. He says you'll know him. He used to be the market manager down Ridley Road and Kingsland Waste, where you had a stall in your early days. He says he still remembers having a chat with you about getting a better pitch for your stall, and all those aerials and that electrical stuff you used to sell there. Do you remember Charlie? [Long pause] Why are you both smiling?'

'We're both smiling because: a) I've never heard of Charlie Saunders, b) I never had a stall in Ridley Road market, c) I never had a stall in Kingsland Waste market, and d) I never sold electrical goods off a stall.

'But don't worry, mate, you've just been speaking to one of those people who dine out on stories they make up about knowing me. They take snippets of information that they've seen in the press or on telly – or, who knows, maybe they even read it in my autobiography – then they just make up some pure fantasy. Anyway, trust me when I tell you it's all bollocks.

'What fascinates me is that when you told Charlie that *you* know me, he should have thought better of spinning you that load of crap, because he must have known it was absolute rubbish and that eventually you'd come back to him and tell him that I *don't* know him!'

I still don't know why people do this and, as hard as it may be for you to understand, this happens all the time! Sometimes I even get into arguments with people who swear they know me. 'I'm sorry, I *don't* know you, and I never sold phones to Tesco in the seventies.' In some cases, when I close the story down, it's like shattering a dream for these people; a dream they have lived on for ages.

I might be sounding like a bit of an arsehole here, but I simply can't resist it when I hear people spout off such rubbish, particularly if they're the loud, flash sort. However, there are also situations when some doting old-timer says something like that to

me, such as how I went to school with their son, or that their daughter's first date was with me. It's all nonsense, but they are nice old people, so I never shatter their dream. I just say, 'Oh yes, give them my regards.'

Sometimes wealth can bring about snobbery, and I have seen examples of this with people I knew from my younger days; people who came from the same place I came from and elevated themselves financially in the business world. That's all fine, but they've forgotten their roots. When they speak to people now, it's as if they're royalty. I won't name them, but they do annoy me tremendously. I have always tried to keep my feet on the ground and talk to everybody the same way, regardless of their status, because I remember where I came from. It's just a shame that some of these other people don't.

There's another kind of snobbery I often encounter. Because I came from a working-class environment in Hackney, there are the snobs who wouldn't dream of talking to or mixing with me, despite me being a success and making a lot of money – in a way they may consider crude or vulgar. Heaven knows who these people think they are. Now, I can possibly understand an *actual* member of the royal family acting in this manner, perhaps, but these people take it to the extreme.

There are also those who wouldn't have given me the time of day in the past, but who changed their attitude when I became well known, whether it be in the commercial world as the darling of the City back in the eighties, or as the presenter of *The Apprentice* now. Suddenly they're interested in talking to me. Fortunately, because of my good memory, I can remember the people who ignored me, passed me by and looked down on me as if I were nothing. When they try to strike up a conversation, I take great delight in saying, for example, 'You've seen me around for the past thirty years and you've always walked past me like we're two ships in the night. Why is it that now you want to talk to me?'

I love rubbing it in. They get the point and normally we never speak again.

Anyway, that's that little lot off my chest, and it may give you an insight into my nature. And a few hints on what not to say if you meet me!

Reading on, you will find me expressing quite a lot of my opinions. You might agree with much of what I say, but I'm sure you will not agree with everything. Some of it might even anger you a bit, but that's the way I see it.