Robert Middleton Interviews Al Ritter


Let me tell you a little bit about Al. He spent the last 20 years as a management consultant, and before becoming a consultant he held senior-level positions with Citicorp, PepsiCo and Swift & Company. Al is a sought-after expert in leadership development, building high-performance teams, strategy planning and implementation, managing large-scale change and strengthening corporate culture.

His consulting clients span numerous industries, both in the United States and abroad. He is a frequent speaker for business and professional groups and conducts numerous seminars and workshops.

Al has written a bestselling book called *The 100/0 Principle*. Al, welcome to the call. I’m really excited to be speaking to you about this.

Al: Thank you, Robert. Great to be with you.

Robert: We’re going to talk about *The 100/0 Principle*. Why don’t we just start out? Tell me what is the 100/0 Principle?

Al: The actual concept is very simple, and that is that most people look at the relationships they have with other people in a 50/50 way. That is I take 50% responsibility for the relationship. You take 50% responsibility for the relationship, and the two ends will meet, and we’ll have a great relationship.

Robert: Right. That makes sense.
Al: Now the problem with that concept is that whenever something breaks down in the relationship, each of us will tend to point at the breakdown that’s happening in the other’s 50%.

We’ll see very clearly what the other person’s not doing that they should be doing, and that other person will see clearly what we’re not doing that they think we should be doing, and the relationship tends to break down. That’s the 50/50 relationship we’ve all heard about over the years.

About 20 years ago, a German philosopher came up with a new relationship theory called “The 100/100 Principle” meaning what if each party to a relationship takes 100%? That is full responsibility for the relationship. It has to work.

That particular theory or principle had the same basic flaw that the 50/50 had, and that is that when something goes wrong, when some breakdown occurs in the relationship, we tend to look at the other person’s 100% and say, “Hey, you didn’t fulfill what you said you were going to do,” so the relationship breaks down.

The other inherent flaw in that is that each person is expecting 100% from themselves and the other, and that’s almost impossible. There are going to be situations in life that come up when the person can’t fulfill his or her 100%, so that particular theory didn’t work either.

I’ll tell you more about this in a minute, but what happens when people take 100% responsibility expecting zero in return, those are the relationships that really work. It sounds counterintuitive, and it looks kind of even
ridiculous when you first hear about it, but when I take 100% responsibility for my relationship with you, expecting zero in return, great things happen. That’s the definition of what the 100/0 relationship is.

Robert: What would that look like in a practical situation, practical life or even in business? I assume this is not just about romantic relationships. This is any relationship: a friend, coworker, clients, or anybody that you’re working with. You’re saying the position to take is, “I’m 100% responsible, and they’re 0% responsible for things working out. I’m taking all the burden on myself.” It might seem like a burden to people, but that’s interesting.

Give me some more ideas around this. It makes sense. I’ll be 100% responsible. It sure is easy to blame people, but this is a place where you really can’t blame because you’re 100%, right?

Al: Yes. The first thing to recognize is that you and I, and all of us, tend to have a reaction to other people based on whether we think they’re right or wrong and whether we agree or disagree with them. The answer to the question of are they right or wrong, or do we agree or disagree, will determine our relationship, left to our own devices. That’s our normal way of reacting to other people.

The consequence of that kind of a reaction is often unsatisfactory and ineffective. The key to this whole thing is to be alert and aware of that typical reaction that each of us has as human beings and actually determine an alternate response to people who are different than us, who we don’t agree with or who we think are not right.
An alternate response is a thoughtful and choice-based response called “I am going to take responsibility for this relationship because the relationship is more important than who’s right or wrong.”

You kind of hit it a minute ago, Robert. Where the relationship is more important than who’s right or wrong is just about every relationship in our lives: marriage relationship, relationship with our kids, extended family, coworkers, and if we’re in business, with our suppliers and vendors.

It’s really everybody in our lives where the relationship is more important than who’s right or wrong. We’re so quick to take the position that, “Oh, that person’s wrong; therefore, that’s going to influence my relationship with him or her.”

Now I know it sounds counterintuitive, but it really makes a huge difference in two aspects of life. One is our personal satisfaction and happiness, and the other is our effectiveness at work and in our leadership roles. We’re all leaders in various aspects of our lives, so leadership effectiveness as well as personal happiness and satisfaction.

Robert: As you’re talking, I’m thinking, “What if the other person is _____?” Fill in the blank. The other person is, for want of a really insulting word, a jerk. Remember the label that used to be on people’s cars “Mean People Suck?” There are mean people out there. There are jerks and idiots. We can maybe forgive idiots because they just aren’t so smart, but there are jerks.
I can understand this. You’re dealing with someone that’s fairly reasonable and not a bad person, but every once in a while they’re a bit jerky, or they’re doing stuff that irritates the heck out of us. If any of you on the call have been married, and I’m sure many of you have, you know that your partner sometimes drives you crazy, even though you love them.

Put that aside. Let’s look at an extreme example. You have someone that you’re working with. A coworker is often a situation, or perhaps a relative, uncle, cousin, in-law, and they’re just jerks. All I want to do is make that jerk wrong for being a jerk. Of course, that’s the kneejerk reaction, so to speak, to jerks. It’s hard to tolerate this person.

How can the 100/0 Principle work even in that kind of extreme case?

**Al:** Of course, all of us have those extreme cases in our lives.

**Robert:** Sure. That’s not the majority of cases, but it’s easy to justify being a jerk back to the jerk because they’re a jerk. At least we think they are for whatever reason.

**Al:** Let’s take work as an example first. We’re not saying we can’t demote or fire somebody or dismiss somebody from work or a situation where some kind of disciplinary action has to be taken.

We’re saying that we should have an uncommon commitment, that’s that 100% commitment, to developing people through our coaching, feedback, and the kind of straight talk that we need to have with the people around us who are jerks in whatever way they are.
I’ve dealt with thousands of leaders in the last 20 years, as you mentioned in your kind introduction. I personally have done this too. I very quickly go to performance appraisal. When somebody is not pulling their weight, or when somebody’s acting like a jerk, or ticking off the whole place, I very quickly will tend to go to some kind of an appraisal and take tough action with the person instead of saying, “Wait a minute. What’s going on here with this person? Is their intent and effect equal?”

In other words, their effect is negative, but maybe their intention is completely different and they don’t even know it. What can I do to help that person be successful as opposed to the quick judgment about the person’s a jerk? I have to take tough action, etc.

Robert: You vilify that person. We complain about that person. It’s like we almost revel in the fact of them being a villain and us being a victim, and that doesn’t get us anywhere.

Al: What even makes it worse is that we have people around us telling us how right we are and how jerky that other person is.

Robert: Right, so it’s a conspiracy that way.

Al: That’s a very difficult thing. It’s rampant in business. I’m looking at it as a business case. We get a lot of people around us agreeing with us, and then it’s even more difficult for us to take a step backward to say, “Hey, wait a minute. What’s really going on here? What can I do to take 100% responsibility for this relationship with this person and help this person be the person they can be?”
When we do that, all of a sudden, most of the time, that person’s going to come around. Now sometimes they don’t, and we do have to take disciplinary action or tougher actions with the person. Most of the time, when we treat people with grace and kindness, the grace and kindness we extend to them will come back with grace and kindness by them to us.

The thing I want to mention that I didn’t mention earlier is that the relationship starts out at 100/0. I take 100% responsibility, but the zero almost always goes up the ladder to where the relationship becomes 100/100 in all domains of life, whether it’s work or otherwise.

Not every time. There’s no guarantee, but people are people. We’re all human beings. When we see people treating us with grace and kindness, especially when it’s undeserved, we’re going to typically react in kind to the other person. The 100/0 start becomes something approaching 100/100. It happens at work as well as other domains of life.

Robert: This is not unlike the famous Golden Rule, right?

Al: It’s very much like the Golden Rule. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you, for sure. Another way of saying that is if I want to create a great relationship with somebody, it’s my responsibility to do that. It starts with me.

Robert: We think we can change people, but that’s kind of an illusion. We definitely can’t change people by blaming them. We see that so much in politics these days is that it is a blame game. “The Republicans are this and only if they do that, the swines, the bastards, then everything
would be great.” There’s no partisanship. It’s terrible, and I’ve never seen it worse in my lifetime, so maybe you have to get a copy of your book to all the members of Congress.

Al: Seriously.

Robert: It’s so entrenched. We can see this kind of not 100/0 Principle playing out in politics in the world stage a lot these days. There’s a lot of blame to go around.

Al: You sure can, for sure. The other thing that can get in the way is that most of us, and even the politicians in Washington, I think, can agree that at the end of our lives, when we look back and see what really was important, it was the relationships we had with people in our lives more than the acquisitions and money and so forth. Most people would basically agree with that concept. Relationships equate to personal satisfaction and happiness.

Where people have trouble—and what I’ve discovered over the last 20 years, especially as a consultant, is that relationships not only create happiness and satisfaction, but they also create results. In other words, the very results we want, like what we want in Washington right now or in our business or personal lives—measurable results, sales and earnings and new laws that make sense in Washington—all those kinds of things that are hardcore results, relationships are key too.

You can’t have the kind of results you want without great relationships. I’ve learned that the hard way, personally. I didn’t even know that the first 18 years of my career in corporate America. I wish I had known it because I would
have been much more effective and produced much greater sustainable results in my areas of responsibility.

Most people don’t know that. They look at relationship as sort of that soft thing that it’s nice to have, and it makes me happier, but it doesn’t equate directly to the results I’m trying to produce, when it creates tremendously directly. In fact, about 70% of results are caused by the relationships you have. All the studies show that.

Robert: Really?

Al: Yes, it’s amazing. I’m talking about business now, and I would assume it’s the same in any other domain. The reason we know that is that Marshall Goldsmith is a very well-known management consultant, and he works for the Levin Group.

They did a study of CEOs who had been let go from their position within the first three years of taking on the CEO role. Seventy percent of the CEOs that were let go were let go primarily because of their inability to create personal relationships with the people around them.

Robert: Leadership is all about relationships, right?

Al: It really is.

Robert: It’s not about knowing the technology, techniques, or strategies. There are a zillion people that can work on that, but it’s you motivating, supporting, encouraging and really leading people, which is all about relationships. A great leader takes 100% responsibility for that and treats people well.
Let’s look at the domain of the self-employed professional. Most of the people listening to this are self-employed professionals. A lot of them have been in corporations, and I’m sure they can definitely relate to what you’re talking about here.

This is one that has come up. It comes up for everybody every once in a while. It’s called “the problem client.” The problem client is never happy with what you’re doing. They complain a lot and blame you for their lack of success. We’ve all perhaps had a nightmare or two in this area.

I guess, as you say, just like in a corporation, it doesn’t mean you have to take abuse and you have to keep this client forever. There’s no law that says that. Do you have any examples or things in that domain?

Al: Sure. I’ve been working with thousands of leaders over the last 20 years, and they all weren’t totally thrilled with what I was asking them to do.

Robert: Nor were they saints, right?

Al: They weren’t saints. The key thing, it seems to me, is to learn to treat people with dignity and respect, even when they don’t deserve it. That’s the 100/0 principle. It should be a little easier with customers and clients because they’re paying you, but not necessarily. I think we all tend to make mistakes, even with our customers and clients because we get upset by the way they’re treating us, just like we do in life in general.

The key is to notice that upset occurring within ourselves and then say, “Wait a minute. I’m not going down that
avenue. I’m going to do something different with this client.” What people can do differently is say, “What can I do right now to help this client be the kind of client I want him to be?” It’s not getting angry. It’s not finger pointing. It’s really sitting down with them and understanding where they’re coming from, what they see, and then how I can gently and with graciousness coach them to be the best person they can possibly be.

It really takes grace, gentleness and kindness. The word kindness, for example, is not what you’d call a word used a lot in consulting or business, but kindness is very important. We all want to be treated with dignity, respect and kindness.

I think that when it comes to consulting and having our own business like that with clients, we need to be kind, decent and generous with those people. That doesn’t mean being bowled over by them or anything like that. It means standing up for what we know is right, but doing it in a gentle and kind way that’s not going to upset the apple cart.

I’ll tell you what. What I just said is hard for most of us to do, but once you do it a few times, it becomes a habit. You don’t even have to think about it anymore. That’s the nice thing about this. It becomes a habit. I wish I’d had that habit my first 18 years in business, but I developed, I think, most of that habit over the last 20 years that I’ve been a consultant.

The other thing is you drive yourself crazy if you’re upset by everything around you.
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Robert: How did you come across this principle, and can you remember the first time that you had an insight about this or started to put it into action for yourself?

Al: I sure do. It was way back, 1980. How many years is that? Thirty-one years ago, in 1980, I was the chief financial officer of Swift & Company. The president of Swift, who I reported to directly, told me, “Al, you have a big problem. You don’t have a good relationship with the chief financial officer of our parent company.” It happened to be Esmark at the time.

I said, “Yes, I know. He’s difficult to get along with, and I’m sure he feels the same way about me.” My president said, “You have to create a relationship with him, no kidding, because it’s going to influence everything we’re trying to get done.” I told him, “You couldn’t have asked me anything more difficult.”

To make a long story short, since I really respected the president, I said, “Okay, I’ll do it.” All I did was I treated that CFO, my dotted-line boss to the parent company, with the same dignity and respect that I treated other people in my life. Almost instantly he started treating me with the same dignity and respect.

We had a great relationship for the three years that we worked together. I’ll tell you what. Not only was the relationship good and important in and of itself that we were able to work together, but it also really contributed to our ability as a company to get things done. We were partners with Esmark rather than fighting with each other over our various priorities and strategies.
That partnership with our parent company in many ways was caused by the great relationship we were able to create between the CFO and myself.

That was the first time. We didn’t call it 100/0, by the way. I was just taking responsibility for getting a relationship created there. That was actually the 100/0 Principle without naming it. That was the very first time I came across that and saw the power of doing something like that.

By the way, everybody agreed with me. I’m talking about everybody, 100 people that I worked with day-to-day at Swift. They knew I was right and that other CFO was wrong. You know what I mean?

Robert: Where does that get you, right?

Al: Where does it get me?

Robert: There’s a saying. You said it, really. Would you rather be right or be happy?

Al: And effective.

Robert: Or effective, or many other things. It seems that people are very committed to their positionality, to their rightness, about what they know about how things should be. If only that other person would understand that. What is that so much our prevalent point of view versus this way that you’re talking about?

Al: I’ve asked that question hundreds of times over the last 30 years or so, and I don’t know what the answer is really, to answer specifically. All I can tell you is that as far as I can tell almost all of us are hardwired to very quickly be
judgmental about other people. I don’t know what causes
that. I’ve read research on this, and I don’t know if I’ve
ever seen a definitive answer to your question.

Left to our own devices, we seem to be hardwired to be
judgmental. The worst part of the judgmental is to be
negatively judgmental about people who are different
than us. If that’s true, and I think it is from everything I’ve
seen, we have to observe that and then notice that you
have to be aware of that, and then take action that’s going
to be different than that. Its awareness and choice.

Robert: Al, there’s a parallel to that in marketing, which I
just got
an insight about. I talk about this all the time. In a way,
it’s my 100/0 Principle of marketing. If you’re going to
market to someone, you have to take your attention off
yourself, put it on the prospect and be interested in them.

Al: Exactly.

Robert: That I’ve known for years and years. In fact, it’s perhaps
the key marketing principle.

What people do instead or they think is what they need to
do is, “I have to put the attention on myself and tell
people all about myself.” There’s kind of this egotistical
thing, you might say. “It’s my business. I’m trying to
interest them in my business, so I have to talk about
everything that I do and how I do it.”

After all, we’re inside our own skin. We’re swimming in
our own particular reality, and we’re selfish that way.
We’re selfish for survival.
There’s a TV series called *Unforgettable* where the hero stops the action and steps out. You see two of her. One is sort of looking at herself looking at things. It’s kind of like that. If you stop the action and look, you’d see that that other person really isn’t interested in all that stuff.

That’s really confusing, so people say, “I can’t seem to interest people.” That’s because it’s all about you. It’s very much what you’re saying, right?

**Al:** Absolutely.

**Robert:** If it becomes about the other person, “Tell me about your business and what’s working. How did you get into your business? What are your issues?” then you’re paying attention to them. Their ego is being fulfilled more.

Then a magical thing happens. When you treat someone else with respect from the 100/0, all of a sudden, because you’re treating them in that way, they start getting interested in you. Then they start asking about your business, and then they can finally hear you.

**Al:** That’s exactly right.

**Robert:** There’s an openness because of your level of kindness, interest, concern and all that stuff.

**Al:** Very well said. By the way, what you just said can actually be translated into one word, and that’s the power of listening. I haven’t mentioned that yet, but a lot of times people say, “Give me one or two easy ways of implementing this thing.”

You just said it, but you didn’t use the word either. That is the listening, meaning most of my attention is going to be
on asking good questions of you, and then really listening to the answers, and then asking you more good questions, and emphasize listening rather than speaking.

I know you talk about it all the time in the whole marketing ballgame and everything else about the power of listening. If you really had to translate this 100/0 thing we’re talking about, and everything you just said about getting your attention off yourself and onto the other person, it really translates to listening. As a human being, all we can really do is speak and listen. If we’re not speaking, let’s be listening.

If the listeners on this call could remember one thing, it is really emphasize the power of your own listening rather than your own speaking. Most of us are just the opposite.

**Robert:** The thing to get as well is that it’s not the easiest thing in the world.

**Al:** It’s not.

**Robert:** We want other people to listen to us. There’s an anecdote, if I could share it, that Alan Weiss shared at a seminar. He said, “When I’m at a social gathering, despite the fact that I’m really outgoing in my business, and I’m a speaker and really an outspoken kind of person, at a social gathering I’m a little more of an introvert.

“I’m at a party, and I’m sitting in a corner with my drink. Someone else comes and sits next to me. I just started to ask him questions about him and his life and business.”

He spent about an hour with him. Alan only asked questions and listened. He didn’t tell anything about
himself. He didn’t tell any stories or try to be the center of attention. He just listened. At the end of the conversation, he said, “Alan, it was great to talk with you. This was one of the most interesting conversations I’ve ever had.”

If you think of that, it’s kind of astounding because Alan only gave him the gift of listening. It was interesting because he listened. He drew the person out. Fascinating.

Al: I’ve had exactly the same experience in the last maybe 15 years when I’ve been able to actually implement what you just said better than I had before. I coach leaders one-on-one very often. I coach leaders in various organizations. The typical coaching is about some issue or problem that they’re having.

We all think, “I’d better bone up on this problem before I talk to that person so I can really give good advice,” when the real key, I’ve found, is simply listening and understanding the other person. If you go through the entire conversation and don’t say one profound thing about what they can do differently, they’ll figure it out themselves because of the listening you’ve provided and the questions you’ve asked.

It’s an amazing thing, and most of us don’t know that. Most of us think we have to have all the answers for people.

Robert: I’ve also noticed in my coaching of clients that there’s a part of me that wants to make sure I have some brilliant advice at some point that people just love. Now sometimes you do, and sometimes they have a listening for that.
Even more important is sometimes I'll just ask a pithy question. I've been listening and say, “If you keep doing that, where’s that going to get you?” They say, “Hmm, that’s a very good question. I hadn’t really thought of it that way.”

Great coaches are great listeners who can ask great questions that can bring out the answers that the people already have in themselves.

Al: There you go.

Robert: Sometimes I’m doing a lot of explaining around that, but great questions can move things forward. A great manager can ask, “If you do that, where’s that going to go? What is the next step that’s going to help you produce the result? What are the resources we can provide to you to make sure that happens sooner?”

Al: Very good, Robert. You just said what I was about to say. What you’re saying pertains to all domains of life, as far as I can tell. In other words, it’s not only as independent business owners, consultants and coaches like most of us are that work with you.

It’s also leaders or managers in organizations at any level. I think it’s about families. Anything we’re involved in in the various domains of our lives, the more we listen and ask questions and let the other people do most of the talking, the better, more effective and happier we’re going to be.

It’s an amazing thing. It’s counterintuitive because we’re all hardwired to do a lot of talking.
Robert: I know. If I can’t talk and give my friends, associates, clients or employees my opinion, then I have the thought that I’m somehow diminished, but it’s really the opposite.

Al: It’s just the opposite. Winston Churchill had a great quote. It’s in my book on Page 47. “Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak. Courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.” Isn’t that interesting? We have it just the other way around, obviously, but sitting down and listening, apparently Churchill was very good at it.

Covey wrote the book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, and then *The 8th Habit*. One of his major chapters is the gift of listening that we can provide for each other. These deep thinkers like Covey and Churchill are saying the same thing you and I are in different words. This is very powerful stuff. It’s what *The 100/0 Principle* is all about.

Robert: I wonder if we can explore this in relationship to the selling process. Having and working with a client is one thing, but of course people are coming to me to find out how to market and convert clients.

It’s very much the same. Selling is mostly listening. It’s mostly finding out what the needs are, where they want to go and that kind of thing.

Any insights about that in the selling process for you?

Al: For me, personally, I can tell you that I used to do an awful lot of talking when I was in the selling role years ago, when I first started consulting 22 years ago. I actually thought that the more impressive I could be in terms of
the great stuff we do for clients, the more effective I’d be. I noticed my closing rate was something less than 10%, and probably 4% or 5%.

**Robert:** Your closing rate was 10%, but you were right.

**Al:** I was right. By the way, all of us were right. I worked in a small consulting firm with about 10 of us, and we all pretty much did the same kind of thing in our selling technique. Everybody had about the same closing rate. We couldn’t figure out how to get it higher.

There were other people who did the same kind of work we did in other consulting firms who had more like a 40% or 50% closing rate. We couldn’t quite figure out why they were way better than us until we sat down with them one day and asked them what they did in their sales calls.

What they did, of course, was what we’ve just been talking about: a lot of questions, really understanding what the issues were. Even when they had an answer, they didn’t even provide it at the time. They wanted to ask more questions to really get a full sense of what was going on before they talked.

I think most of us have learned that the hard way. I certainly have. It’s really important to do that. Even though it’s counterintuitive to most of us, we have to ask those good questions. There’s no doubt that that is what makes for effective selling.

**Robert:** I’d like to hear a few more anecdotes from you about how you turned things around. I think the situation of this person in the other division that you turned around is a great story. Do you have any other good stories?
Al: When I do public speaking, I usually start my speech with the story I’m about to tell you. The first thing I ask in a public speech is, “How many of you have had a toxic boss?” Say there are 100 people in the audience. How many people would you say raise their hand and say they’ve had a toxic boss? I’m talking about all ages of the 100 people.

Robert: I don’t know, 80%?

Al: It’s actually 100%.

Robert: One hundred percent.

Al: I’ve never seen anyone not raise their hand, even if they’re 28 years old and they’ve only had one job. It’s amazing.

Robert: Bosses are inherently toxic. That’s interesting.

Al: Isn’t it interesting? That’s a big issue.

Robert: That tells a lot about western civilization right there, doesn’t it?

Al: It’s an amazing thing. It has a lot of implications, obviously, about how difficult our jobs can be when we have toxic bosses, how many difficult bosses there are out there. I think it’s even worse now with the economy being in trouble because people tend to go back to what they know and do well, which is be tough, in command and control. There are probably more of the difficult bosses now than there ever have been.

Let me just tell you this quick story because I think it’s very useful, for not only people in corporate America that have difficult bosses, but all of us in all domains of life
where we run into difficult people. I had four toxic bosses in my 18-year corporate career. The first three I did not handle very well. I was very judgmental. The last time, I got fired because I was so judgmental. The other two I just had a very difficult and unhappy relationship with him and in the company.

The fourth boss we finally got it right, and here’s what happened. He was a guy who was the most difficult of all the tough bosses I’ve had. He took away the self-esteem of the people around him. He was critical of everybody, and he never smiled. He just was almost impossible to work with.

Here I am his CFO. I have to work with him every day. I’m the chief financial officer. I have five really good people who reported directly to me. At the beginning of our relationship with him the five of us made a pact that no matter what the boss said or did we weren’t going to take it personally. We were going to treat him with the decency and respect that he deserved just by virtue of his position as president of the company.

Guess what happened, Robert. Here’s the key thing. For two years, we worked that way with him, never letting him get to us and doing everything we knew how to do to do a good job. After two years he never changed one iota. He was still the mean, tough, and nasty guy that he was at the beginning.

Do you remember I said there’s no guarantee?

Robert: Right.
Al: Guess what happened. He got fired, and five of the six of us, after two years, got promoted. When we got promoted we were told not only was the fact that we worked with him important in and of its own right, but we were the only people in the company who could work with him effectively in the entire company. Secondly, because we were able to work with him, people saw the quality of our work, the financial analysis and the other stuff we did.

Isn’t that interesting? The point I want to make with that story is that even when the other person doesn’t change, when you take 100% responsibility and the other person remains at zero, good news occurs anyway. It’s an amazing thing, and it happens all the time.

Robert: It’s kind of like a little game with you and your team. Let’s show that we can be above this, work cooperatively and not let him ruin our lives.

Al: Exactly. It also demonstrates the value of persistence. Very often we give up too soon. We take 100% responsibility. We work at it for a couple of days or weeks, and if the other person doesn’t change we give up on it. Maybe that’s not the right way, but be persistent and see what happens. It doesn’t cost anything to be decent and nice to a person, to treat him with the kind of respect you would for people that you really like.

I think it’s an example of not only the toxic boss issue, which is a rampant issue in America, but it’s also an example for all of us in any domain of life. We need to be persistent with the people around us and not give up. Even when they treat us harshly or not in the way we’d
like them to, don’t let that defeat us. Keep going. Take 100% responsibility and see what happens.

**Robert:** You’re inspiring me, Al. I’m looking at some relationships of mine that are not as good as they can be, and you’re getting me to really think exactly what you want me to think, which is, “It’s up to you, Robert. It’s up to you to be kind and considerate. It’s up to you to take their tastes into account instead of always wanting your tastes.”

It’s a hard lesson for us human beings.

**Al:** Yes, it really is. One thing I didn’t mention, and it’s not in my book, and I’ve thought of it since I wrote the book. We would have done this if I had thought of it at the time. There’s nothing wrong with making gracious and decent requests of people that aren’t changing, the ones that stay at the zero. We did that a little bit probably with this boss I just related to you.

Very often in life we give up. We say, “That person will never change,” and we just give up on the relationship, instead of saying, “Wait a minute. What can I do here to make a request or create a boundary?” “I’ve got to tell you what you did yesterday just didn’t work for me. Could you not do that again?” or “When you said what you said in yesterday’s meeting, it really upset half the people in the room.” There’s nothing wrong with saying that and giving feedback to difficult people in our lives, as long as we do it with grace and kindness.

We didn’t really do that as much as we probably could have with that boss that I just related. Even though I’m talking about the zero staying at zero and us having
persistence in that, it doesn’t mean we can’t do something that could change the whole zero to something different.

Robert: I know you teach this to your clients. It’s a core part of the work you do with your clients. What kind of results have you seen with your clients that have started to apply this kind of stuff?

Al: The results are amazing. I’ll just give you a couple of quick examples. In that one example of a difficult boss, the company, actually for the first time in 10 years, started making money.

If we had fought that boss and started really going along with our emotions about him, that money would have never been made because we did a lot of work helping him understand the priorities, helping him understand the P&L and the balance sheet and what the components were that had to be managed effectively.

Even though he was difficult, we helped him manage the company at least to a degree where we were able to start making money. That was one example.

An even greater, more prevalent example might be where you have companies who have difficulty working between functions. It’s called the “silo mentality,” and it’s rampant in corporate America. It always has been, and I’m sure it’s even worse today, from what I can observe and given the economy and everything.

That’s where people in one function dislike and don’t talk to people in another. Very often it starts at the top. The senior vice president of marketing and the senior vice president of manufacturing have hated each other for 10
years and they don’t talk to each other. Therefore, it translates down into the organizations where the people in each function don’t talk to each other. They’re real good to each other within the same function, but they are not effective with each other across functional boundaries.

What’s amazing about the 100/0 principle is that if you can get the two function heads to start treating each other with decency and respect and take responsibility for the way they treat each other because leadership has an exponential impact on people, it translates down to the entire organization. They start talking and relating to each other and help each other be effective. I’ve seen many examples of this in my consulting experience.

Guess what happens to sales and earning when you have two key functions like that working together that never have before. It’s unbelievable. I’ve seen people go from breakeven or 5% return on sales to 25% return on sales. They said, “Al, the only thing we’ve done differently is we started working together like we should have been doing the last 10 years.”

Robert: It’s not a big mystery, but nevertheless it was almost impossible for them to do without some support, guidance and giving them the information they needed.

Al: That’s just an example. I’ve seen it several different times.

Another big example is I’ve run into many leaders I’ve coached that are micromanagers. They make the people around them wrong about almost everything.

Robert: And never acknowledge them for success.
Al: Never acknowledge them, and never treat them with the dignity and respect that they really want and need. As soon as they see their micromanagement ways and then the 100/0 principle and that it means their job is to take responsibility for the relationship and serve and help their people to be the best they can be, all of a sudden sales and earnings start going through the roof.

If you have the top eight people, the CEO and the seven direct reports, working together effectively as a high-performance team, it’s going to influence the entire organization and the measurable results that organization produces. I’ve seen that many times. When just eight or nine people at the very top start working together like that, it really influences everything in the organization.

Robert: Now I want to talk a little bit about your book. This is an interesting book. It’s published by Simple Truths. You can go to www.SimpleTruths.com and put in The 100/0 Principle and find the book.

It’s an interesting way of publishing. It’s not like an ordinary book. It’s a square book about six or seven inches square, and it’s beautifully designed. The category of this book is a gift book, but some of these gift books that I’ve seen are kind of thin on substance, you might say, kind of airy-fairy stuff.

This has this beautiful design of a gift book, and yet on every page there’s something pithy and the next page even pithier. There’s a lot of depth to this. It makes it a very easy-to-read book. You can read the whole thing in two or three hours.

Al: Even less, I think, probably an hour or hour and a half.
Robert: Probably good to read it a little slower for it to sink in, or read it a couple of times. I’ve read it once, and I’m going to read it another time.

This is a bestseller, mostly sold through Simple Truths. Is this in bookstores at all?

Al: No, it’s not. In fact, Simple Truths doesn’t sell through bookstores.

Robert: Yet Al is selling 1,000 of these books a month through Simple Truths. A lot of people have bought it, and a lot of people have gotten back to you with stories about how it has helped them in their life and business.

Al: I wish I could show everybody some of the emails I get. The emails make it all worthwhile, even not talking about how many books are sold. Principals of high schools or middle schools are telling me that they read the book and it changed their whole philosophy and actions in dealing with teachers, the administrative people and the students. Their job as the principal is they have a relationship with all those entities. Once they started creating that relationship, great things started happening in the school.

It’s really a book that pertains to all domains of life. It’s an amazing thing. Some people have written that the book saved their marriage because they started realizing that they were treating each other with looking at the other person for the kind of behavior that they weren’t getting, instead of saying, “What can I do here to help make this thing work?”

Robert: It goes without saying I recommend that people pick this book up. Of all the topics I’ve ever talked on, this might be
the most important because this really helps you have a workable relationship with everybody in your life. When you have a workable relationship with everybody, your life is better. Your relationships, family and marketing are better as well.

If you simply read this book with the question, “How can I use this to make my marketing and selling better?” a lot of things will pop out for you. You’ll get a lot of ideas. Then you could also read it with the perspective, “How can I use this principle to help my clients better?” This is the kind of book that you might want to give to your clients to really learn these principles.

The great thing about this is the basic principles are not hard. They’re not complex. It’s the simplest principle in the world in a way, but it’s the hardest of all because we’re stuck in our egos and being right. That one shift can really rock our world completely.

Al: It really can.

Robert: If you want to be a more successful coach or consultant, understanding this 100/0 principle in depth can really make a big difference.

I interview people and mention their books. I often don’t promote their books as enthusiastically for whatever reason, but this is really something that is important for people to understand, embrace and apply.

It sometimes takes a while for this to get through our thick skulls because we are so focused in the wrong place. We’re a little too selfish, a little too right, or a little too controlling, or maybe a lot of some of those things.
Al: You’re right. You just reminded me of one thing I haven’t said. The 100/0 principle applies to almost every relationship we have in our lives. There are a couple where it doesn’t apply, and it’s obvious, but I have to say it anyway because it’s important.

People who are dishonest, who we can’t trust or who demonstrate criminal behavior of some sort, obviously we have to have our antennae up for that kind of thing. It’s like the Penn State situation that just has occurred recently. We have to be aware and alert to people who we don’t want to practice 100/0 with.

Robert: This isn’t about being nice. Often people say, “You just be nice to people.” That might be a starting point, but it’s much deeper than that.

Al: It really is. It’s an objective true caring about another person. When I’m coaching a person, sometimes I don’t want to be as nice. I want to make sure I get a point across to something. It’s really about coaching and caring about another person.

Robert: I wish we could get this into the hands of all the members of Congress and actually have them read it. It’s one of those books.

Al: Maybe there’s a way to do that. I don’t know. I haven’t even thought of that, by the way. You just raised a big issue for me that maybe we should be doing something.

Robert: Maybe you should do a campaign for that. There are only 500-something members of Congress. It’s not the most expensive project in the world. Of course, we don’t know if they’d read it.
It’s a simple message that applies to everybody. It’s not, “Here’s our way, and this is right.” It’s a whole different thing, so it’s very nonpartisan, you might say.

Al: I would say. It’s about who we are as human beings.

Robert: We can talk about this later.

Al: Great, I’d love to.

Robert: Anything that can help the world in any little way is a good thing.

Al: Absolutely.

Robert: That’s what we’re trying to do here and what Al has done with this brilliant book.

Al: Thank you, Robert, for those kind words.

Robert: That’s about it. I think people get what the principle’s about. I feel much more excited and motivated than when I got on this call.

Al: Great.

Robert: I’m feeling excited about some things that I’m going to put into action because of this. It just really has stimulated my awareness about this.

I really want to thank you for taking the time for this interview. It was great.

Al: Robert, thank you. You’re very welcome, and I really appreciate the questions. I love talking about this. It’s probably my favorite. Leadership in general, and the 100/0 principle in particular are my favorite subjects, so
it was a pleasure to talk to you about it. Thank you, very much.

Robert: Thank you. We’ll talk to you again soon.