



Case-Study: An Interview With ALLTASK CEO, Danny Fincham

How a construction company used *Enterprise MENTOR* to differentiate itself and drive revenue and profit growth

ALLTASK Construction

When Danny Fincham started his scaffolding company from his kitchen table in 1987, little did he know that 20 years later he would own one of Kent's largest construction, engineering, maintenance and multitasking companies.

His business ALLTASK Construction now has an annual turnover of around £35m and regularly makes annual pre-adjusted profits in excess of £5 million. In a construction market which is suffering and stalling, ALLTASK is thriving, finding new markets, and is very, very profitable.

Danny attributes the success of ALLTASK to its unparalleled focus and attention on its customer. Each year, ALLTASK works with a core base of around 60 B2B customers.

By consistently delivering an extraordinary service, ALLTASK is able to get more repeat contracts, easily find new customers and profitably grow through word of mouth referrals.

Danny knows that the key to his business's success is his people, of which there are around 500 full time employees — a mixture of direct salaried and self employed contractors.

Danny is always on the look out for new ways to grow his business, particularly by developing his staff. He knows that if the guys doing the work are delivering at the highest level, they will ultimately give customers every reason to repeat buy and recommend, and give them no reason to go elsewhere to competitors.

Danny knows as the CEO of ALLTASK that it is imperative to put the needs of his customers first. He knows that if he can get that way of thinking into every member of his team he can make sure that customers receive the best level of service.

It was this ambition to get his own business-owner-way of thinking into his workforce that led Danny to invest in *Enterprise MENTOR*.

Enterprise MENTOR is a business mentoring programme which managers, senior executives, business owners and CEOs use to drive growth in revenues and profits

by getting their teams to think more like customer-focused business-owners, rather than traditional employees.

It is 3 years since Danny first introduced *Enterprise MENTOR* into ALLTASK, and since then his profitability has grown significantly. The level of innovation and customer focus in his company has changed beyond all recognition.

In this short report, you'll learn some of the thinking which led Danny and ALLTASK to invest in *Enterprise MENTOR*, and you'll discover the results they have achieved (and you can achieve too).

What follows is Danny's story in his own words.



Danny Fincham
CEO of ALLTASK Limited

1: What was the business problem/challenge you faced which made you invest in *Enterprise MENTOR*?

Each year we work with a small number of clients, but much of our revenue is based on repeat work, and getting new clients through referrals.

I know clients will only repeat buy from us if we deliver an outstanding project for them, and as CEO of ALLTASK, it is this level of excellence that I continually strive for.

The difficulty I have is that although we have technically good people, they don't always 'get it' and don't always realise that they are the interface between the company and the client.

They haven't started a business.

Part of owning a business is that you are passionate about it, you want to have the lorries looking immaculate and the equipment loaded perfectly and everything looking right, but employees don't always.

I've spent several years getting frustrated as to why they didn't and constantly asked the question, "How can I make them think like me and put the customer first?"

And that's where *Enterprise MENTOR* came in!

2: What made you decide to invest in *Enterprise MENTOR*?

I get approached all the time by training companies, and I don't believe in them, but *Enterprise MENTOR* was different.

For me it was the idea of the inverted pyramid.

Normally the CEO and board of directors are at the top of the pyramid and the workers are at the bottom, but *Enterprise MENTOR* turned that around. It inverted the pyramid.

The employees are actually at the top, next to the customers.

When I got that clear in my head I thought, 'Right, what training do I give my employees?'

They turn up on site in their scruffy jeans putting the scaffold outside a window, screaming and shouting.



A traditional company structure with the CEO at the top, and employees and customers below.



***Enterprise MENTOR* inverts the pyramid and puts customers at the top in your business, supported by employees.**

What *Enterprise MENTOR* has done is made my employees understand that the customer is king.

It gives us a mechanism to get *my way of thinking* all the way down to the frontline. I wouldn't have been able to work out, in such a structured way, how I think and how I can get my employees to think this way too. *Enterprise MENTOR* does that for me.

3: What does *Enterprise MENTOR* offer you?

I realised that we spend a lot of money maintaining our vehicles, our equipment our offices, our health and safety systems — but we were spending nothing on the staff.

I asked myself, 'If I want to build my business around repeat and referral customers, what do I have to do to achieve that?'

The answer was I had to make sure my workforce understood that the very nature of growing our business is through repeat and referral customers.

I had to get my way of thinking into the guy who is knocking in the bolts.

I read and listened to *Enterprise MENTOR*. It is excellent.

There is nothing new in there because that is the way I think but what it did was to give me a framework and set of tools to take my mindset to the staff.

It would have taken me years to do what *Enterprise MENTOR* offers.

4: How has *Enterprise MENTOR* helped you address your business challenges?

This is a challenging industry so you have to differentiate yourself, which is all part of what *Enterprise MENTOR* provided for us.

We needed to find a difference and the difference is our people.

I want the business to be the best it can be. I want customers to become fans of ALLTASK and clients to come back and use our services again and again.

The implementation of *Enterprise MENTOR* has been pivotal in the growth of our business, mainly because we don't advertise. All our business comes from referrals as a result of the standard of work we do on the site.

This comes from my staff understanding the client and knowing that no matter how small they are, or how tiny the job is, that it could lead to masses of repeat work.

An example of that is we did a job on the Millennium Bridge (when it was wobbly) for the largest steel company based in the north of England. The man we worked with moved to Wembley Stadium and said, "I've got a tower for you to put up for the new stadium."

It was a tiny job, just a day's work for two men.

But we won the job simply because all the other companies said, "Forget it, we're not doing that." They just weren't focussed on the customer — we were.

The original job was £710. Our final account was £9.4 million. That story is now folklore in our business.

You get a tiny client who gives you a tiny job and that goes back to someone and they say, "They are a really good company" and that someone will spend a fortune with you.

If you haven't got your staff focussed on your customer, you'll never get there. And that's it! And that's what *Enterprise MENTOR* does, it gets your employees to focus on your customer in the same way you do as the business leader.

5: Who in your company actually gets to go through *Enterprise MENTOR*?

My business model is that I have a supervisor on every site. He controls all aspects of the ALLTASK service, so he might have gone there originally to do the building maintenance and then if we win a scaffold project he will remain as the interface with the customer.

He is the one who knows all the engineers — who are the good ones, who are the bad ones.

They were the starting level for the programme — those supervisors.

Then I backed it to the divisional managers because I knew if they were passing their ideas up to them, they might be sitting on them and not getting them to me, and there might be a blockage.

So we started off with scaffolding. I think it was 11 scaffold supervisors, two managers and then one of the estimators and a health and safety manager.

We've since extended the programme to another group of about ten, and I'm about to start working with my third group very soon.

6: How do you use *Enterprise MENTOR* in your company, how do you make it work?

I tend to work with a core mentoring group of about 10 people. These are people from all age groups: in their 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s and 60s.

Initially I focussed on my remote staff, because my office staff see more of me, and have a better understanding of how I think. Also, the remote staff are closest to the customers, as they are literally on-site.

Initially, I bring the 10 mentees into the boardroom. I usually give them the workbook and MP3 player a couple of days beforehand to get used to it.

I explain the principle and what we are going to achieve.

I explain that I'll be managing the process — so that they can see that I am committing time. What they get excited about is that they get an opportunity to step into my role.

That's what really gets them. I tell them that at the end of each section they will get to answer the question, "*What changes would you make if you were CEO of ALLTASK?*" And I almost work from that back.

I know I'll end up with 500 ideas from a room of 10 people and each one of those points will save me or make me thousands of pounds. That's how I see it. That's the golden nugget.

You must realise that there are guys who see me once every 3 months and there they are sitting down with me for 3 or 4 hours with only 7 or 8 in the room. They get to spend 10 or so afternoons with me.

"How are you doing? Let's read this, let's go through that."

We talk about stories... they get to know me and generally they care about the company. People do care who they work for but it takes a bit of time for them to realise that you do too.

As I'm talking to you now I can't wait to do this again. *Enterprise MENTOR* has got some good memories for me.

7: What do employees like about *Enterprise MENTOR*?

When I announce who is going to be next on the programme, they can't wait to tell me what they would be doing in my role. Quite frankly, who doesn't? Wouldn't you love to sit with the Prime Minister and say, "If I was you I would be doing this!" One-on-one.

The only thing I would say for anyone contemplating the course is, you better be good at what you are doing because you are going to get opinion and you are going to get bias.

If you have any weaknesses they will tell you! It's not just the programme that will flag it up but the social interaction that you have after the programme.

They will turn round to you and say things to you that you may not like.

You like to think as a company owner that everyone is blissfully happy, that you are doing a fantastic job and you will get comments made to you that you have to take your emotion out of.

At the end of the day I am only doing this for one reason and that is to make ALLTASK a better business which leads to them earning more money and having a more secure job. *It's team building of the ultimate.*

8: What specific outcomes have you seen from *Enterprise MENTOR*?

One thing *Enterprise MENTOR* has done is to allow employees to express their opinions directly to me. I'll give you an example. We've got a guy called Coleman who works in our construction division and he came up with the idea of a SMS text number for people to report 'near-misses' on.

In the construction industry a 'near-miss' could mean someone in danger of seriously hurting themselves. If it is addressed and dealt with it is basically a risk before the risk has cost you money.

A near miss could be that someone walked up the stairs today and because it was a frosty morning they were slippery. What Coleman realised was that we needed a quick and anonymous way to report these near-misses. So now anyone can report a near miss by sending a text message which automatically goes to all 4 directors of the business and to our health and safety team.

This idea of sending an anonymous text message came as a result of 3 suggestions which came from *Enterprise MENTOR* ('If you were CEO for the day what would you do?'). I was reviewing the suggestions and one came up that said, 'Can we have an anonymous text number for near misses?' Originally we had said, "Just phone the office", but they didn't want to do that.

This was Coleman's idea and he is particularly proud of it. Every time I see him he says, "That was my idea!" Which is brilliant because he is now going to clients saying, "I have a really great company here. If you come up with a suggestion it gets implemented."

I sit here in my office and I'm out a lot of the time and I couldn't tell you right now what's happening up at Canary Wharf. I don't know whether my men have just put a tube through a window, or been drilling through a wall that's got asbestos content in it. I'm trusting those guys to know that. And those chaps have become empowered by *Enterprise MENTOR*.

9: What tangible financial results have you seen from using *Enterprise MENTOR*?

Clearly one example is the Wembley project where a £710 job turned into a £9.4m contract. That is an example of how our business operates and *Enterprise MENTOR* supports that.

The near-miss idea is another example. Our average accident claim is about £37,000. Our accident statistics are miles ahead of our competitors. Could it be that the near-miss warning system has enabled this? We have altered and changed a lot of things as a result of *Enterprise MENTOR*.

Another example of a near miss is our lorries. We had a guy talk to us because the prop-shafts were exposed as they are on most trucks. He said he heard a clonking noise and the bolts were lose and he mentioned to our transport manager that if the bolts had sheered off, the prop would have come off as he was going down the M25. So we installed wire-mesh guards underneath them — and one came off about 8 weeks ago. It ended up rattling around the guard and the lorry stopped. It didn't come off and go down the motorway. Once again — it is very difficult to tangibly establish the benefits of this.

Also, we used to run 3 and a half tonne lorries around the sites and one of the supervisors said they were too big and that we should have transits. Transits were about a quarter of the cost and they work. This came about as a result of *Enterprise MENTOR* — something was said and then we started discussing it.

I realise saying this that somebody could say that *Enterprise Mentor* is just a suggestion scheme.

Well, it's not! A suggestion scheme is a box with a slot in the top of it, that people randomly slot things in.

This is very different to that.

You are invigorating someone's thought process by virtue of the MP3 mentoring sessions, the workbook and the face-to-face mentoring sessions, and then asking them to apply that where they are working. That's not a suggestion scheme.

Also, it is driven by me as the mentor. You can't underestimate the importance of having the Managing Director as a mentor.

10: What non-monetary results have you seen from using *Enterprise MENTOR*?

You will get to learn a lot more about your teams. Yes, that's the biggest thing. It puts me a lot closer to my staff, and it puts them a lot closer to me and creates huge loyalty.

And you are investing in them. You are investing in the programme and time in them and you are acknowledging that these guys have knowledge that you really value because you want it. And that's huge because everyone loves to feel valued.

Let me give you a tangible example.

We recently became an approved contractor for Carillion plc and they are spending millions with us. About 2 years ago when I went up to meet the supply chain manager and his team, I went in the room, sat down and the opening he gave me was, "At last we get a chance to meet you. We've heard so much about you."

And I said, "Ok. Good or bad?"

And he said, "Very good!"

And the guy said to me, "How do you get your staff so into your business because we can't believe how big your business is. When your guys talk about you they talk as if there are 20 blokes and we look and there are 500 of you."

He said, "I'm amazed! How do you do that?"

I said, "We just listen to our customers!"

We tailor our service to them. We listen to our customers — and that is a direct result of *Enterprise MENTOR*.

4 years ago before this system was in place I was able, within a week, to visit most of the sites. The business was a much smaller operation then. Now it would take me a month to visit all the sites. But now I have a reporting back procedure in place which I have done thanks to *Enterprise MENTOR*, and people know about it. They know that at some time they will be called in and taken on the ten week afternoon induction programme.

11: What else has *Enterprise MENTOR* done for you?

Enterprise MENTOR gives me a framework and a proper mechanical avenue to get the ideas out of clients and employees and into my business.

If you look at my sectors, for example, new construction and refurbishment—they have just crashed. There is no one building industrial units at the moment.

There is a complete over supply out there. We have had the biggest shrinkage of the market place in history since the depression.

But what *Enterprise MENTOR* has allowed me to do is to build in ideas and feedback driven by my clients and employees.

Whilst we've been less busy, we've managed to get more profit. We've also managed to charge more and to tailor our services so much for the client that they don't want to risk using someone cheaper.

Think of it as a V12 motor. You can lose two or three cylinders and still fire. If you are in a 4 stroke and you lose two cylinders then it's over. You've had it.

At the moment I've got some miss-firing cylinders — brickwork for example. We've gone from 200 men to 18. Because the rates of housebuilding have dropped 33-34% and you are being offered brickwork jobs for say, £100,000 with £5,000 profit, I'm not really interested in that. So we backed out of the market. I know that 3 bricklaying companies all turning over more than £5 million went bust in the last 6 weeks. There will be more to come. You can't sustain a business on a 5% return, it's impossible.

When our competitors go bust we sit in the wings, go back and offer customers more added value. The customer says, "We know we're going to pay £140,000 for ALLTASK, but a) they will be there, they won't go bust. And b) £140,000 is £140,000 — it's not £100K plus another £10k, £20k or even £50k because you didn't tell us..." All that aggravation when a price is wrong. But you can't do that unless you have all your cylinders in place.

I wrote an article about the danger of number 1 and it was basically about having one customer, one service, one provider — fatal. If you want to get a big range of services you'd better listen to what the customer wants.

What *Enterprise MENTOR* has given us in the past 3 years is the opportunity to learn what the customer wants. Get it fed back to you so that you can make more strategic decisions and open up more of those cylinders.

But there is a more intangible than that and that allows my guys at the workforce to feel that they are a stakeholder in the business. It has given them this framework, this mechanism or process to be able to say, "Danny, remember when we were doing that programme..."

12: What barriers have you experienced with implementing *Enterprise MENTOR*, and how have you overcome them?

What I would recommend to people implementing *Enterprise MENTOR* is — go off site and do it.

Initially I used to bring the mentees into the office, give them the run down in the meeting room, explain what the programme was and walk away and let them get on with it. It gradually fell over — they weren't doing the work (it wasn't the product not working). They weren't doing the modules so when we did meet it would turn into, "I was really busy and I had to do this job and price that job..."

So we stopped that and then after 3 months we started again.

This time we held our face-to-face sessions at the local Holiday Inn and it was totally different — cups and saucers and coffees and a very different vibe. I would say, "We've got all afternoon and at 5 o'clock we're all going to the bar...turn your mobiles off. I'm the owner....What happens in this room stays in this room."

It was important to give everybody a sense of protection and that depends on how you are as an owner. I am very good at letting people voice their opinions.

Also, the first bunch were very skeptical. I realised that if I was heading it up (as the MD) and I believed in it then that was enough. I think the first group felt a bit foolish — there was a feeling of, "What's the point?"

It wasn't until they got the chance to make suggestions and then watch my response to those suggestions, that they got into it.

For example, the suggestion that Coleman came up with was implemented within a week.

I said, "Here's our new reporting number (for near-misses)". It's on the top of the payroll! Everybody knows!

Every email I send out has a little box and it says, 'Don't forget the near-miss number!' Any health and safety professional will tell you that if everybody reported near-misses we would have no accidents.

And that really motivates people.

Nothing like this exists in our sector. Construction companies don't do mentoring.

13: What do employees/managers like about *Enterprise MENTOR*, and not like about it?

I can only tell you what they like — they like the fact they can get access to me and know that they are influencing the way the business runs, and share their experiences.

I can't tell you what they don't like about it because I don't have a lot of adverse response.

I know one of the guys used to listen to it in bed. His wife said to me at the Christmas do, "He loved it! He couldn't wait to get into bed to get his MP3 plugged in and have his workbook out."

That's great!

14: What makes *Enterprise MENTOR* so innovative and different to other forms of training and development?

What it is — it is hand holding. *Enterprise MENTOR* is hand holding of the highest order. You cannot go wrong with it. You just can't!

The workbook will tell you what to do — Day 1, Day 2, Day 3... it's brilliant. I know how much work has gone into the course.

Enterprise MENTOR holds my hand all the way through it.

It really is a proper vehicle. It is not difficult to implement in your business and at no point do you feel lost.

There are a lot of things I have been on before, seminars that I left — for example, '25 things to get you through the recession.' When I got there they were the same old things.

I never feel lost with *Enterprise MENTOR*.

15: What could other companies learn/take away from *Enterprise MENTOR*?

Where do you start? I think you will find from chatting to people who work for bosses, that a boss will often have lost contact with his customers.

Enterprise MENTOR is a great way of re-establishing that contact — via your own staff. It doesn't get any better than that. You are actually getting your staff to tell you what the client wants.

What *Enterprise MENTOR* promotes is getting them to suggest the solution, rather than saying for example, "The customer wants this."

And you say, "Right, what we do is that." And they say, "We can't do that because we haven't got enough staff."

What they are now saying to you is, "The customer wants this, and I've been thinking about it and we can resolve it by doing that."

So you are not making the decision — you are getting the decisions and the outcomes suggested to you. They've done all the thinking!

I think if you are a company owner and you decide to go down this route, you have to believe in it. The only way you can believe in it is to do it and read it and listen to it!

When I first received *Enterprise MENTOR* I sat down for a day and did it. You have to. I think that any company who has gone through it and comes out of it believing will find the way forward.

That in itself will be a revolution for them and they'll see that it is brilliant.

And if you want tangible results— it's those 50 suggestions (5 a day over 20 days is 100).

16: What would you say to other business leaders thinking of investing in *Enterprise MENTOR*?

What I would draw their attention to is they may be drawn to the non-conclusive parts of this interview. We can't nail specifically how much extra income it has brought to the business, or how much extra sales it has brought to the business.

I can't tell you that £5,000 profit a day is because of *Enterprise MENTOR* but some of it certainly is. I bet if we went out right now and wandered round the office and said, "What's been happening?", someone would say, "We've priced this job and we won it because we worked with them last year and did a great job."

I'm telling you *Enterprise MENTOR* has brought extra profit and extra sales revenue and good feeling. It definitely, definitely has!

It's just an excellent system. It's so integrated into your business — it is now woven into the very fabric of ALLTASK. It's all the disciplines coming together. It's leadership, sales, marketing, management, it's team development, it's customer focus, it's innovation and much, much more.

It makes your customer the focus of your business. I defy anyone who goes through the programme not to see a significant increase in their profits - and I'm not being paid to say this!

I've got no reason to say anything at all. In fact I'd rather not be saying this because *Enterprise MENTOR* has given me a competitive edge!

If you want to understand the power of *Enterprise MENTOR*, think of an experience you've had with a company that was brilliant, and you'll find the essence of what makes them brilliant taught in the mentoring programme.

There are so few companies that are good. Look at Apple. The kids in an Apple shop know everything about everything. They know their products inside out — and they love them! Before you know it you are being whizzed along and you've spent £400 on a phone and £1,600 on a great big PC....

That's it - the focus on you as the customer.

You can't be successful without having these principles in your business. People told me that *Enterprise MENTOR* wouldn't work in the construction sector, but I proved them wrong.

I wouldn't have given up my morning to talk about *Enterprise MENTOR* if it hadn't empowered my business. I owe it a great deal.