

The Apprentice stars join forces to call for Government to do more to help businesses succeed as new taxes start to bite in tough landscape

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A group of The Apprentice stars have called on the Government to do more to help small businesses facing the double-whammy of new tax hikes and a stagnated economy.

[Flex and The City](#) sat down with a panel of former candidates, in collaboration with Press Box PR, to discuss the realities of life since their time in the boardroom.

2023 winner Marnie Swindells linked up with Solomon Akhtar, Raj Chohan, and Reece Donnelly to share their exclusive thoughts on operating in the wake of the new National Insurance charges starting to bite.

Speaking during an hour-long panel hosted by Flex and The City co-founders Tiger-Lily Beck and Demi Smith, the four former stars called for greater support for young entrepreneurs and predicted AI is ready to produce the country's next billionaires.

Reece: "As a nation it's a hell of a lot harder to make money than it used to be. There are so many restrictions, there's so many laws. If you go back to the start of the year, my business had to change from being tax exempt to being on the tax register with 48 hours' notice. It meant we had about 48 hours to try and raise 20% extra capital, so it makes it very hard."

"We are moving on and we are increasing wages, which of course is good for the employees, but that also comes at a cost to an employer. Do I think that it's a much better workplace for the employee? Yes, I have

25 employees myself and I think that they are so much better looked after, but I also think that comes at a hard cost to an entrepreneur. There needs to be some sort of common ground. It would be lovely to see a little bit more support for those people that are coming into it. As an economy it would be great to see the younger generation get a bit of help to make it happen."

Raj: "If we were to ask for one thing it would be 'reduce the taxes'. There's so many things but I think tax is the first. There's got to be a better way of doing this. When entrepreneurs first come into it, it's so hard, first of all to make the money. Then if you're self-employed and you're trying to get on the property ladder, you are three years behind because you've got two years of accounts to produce. There's so many things that need to be changed."

Solomon: "AI is really changing the game for young people. You can replace the marketing team with AI.

It's changing and we are learning literally every day. It is always getting better and that is going to be good for businesses. This is a huge wave, similar to when the internet came out and everyone was jumping on that, then we had crypto. AI is this huge wave and young people getting into that today are gonna to be the next millionaires."

Marnie: "Covid definitely played a part in not working in offices every day and businesses needed to open up. There are a lot of opportunities in it because the world became a lot smaller – but I don't think you can replace that idea of [creating a] culture and going into a place to be part of it. Whether that's a co-working space, there's something really productive about seeing people and being in an environment that is about learning and making the most out of it, and I don't think that can be replicated. I know he's old school but Lord Sugar does have a point.

"Culture is everything, from the leadership to the people – in my case [of running a gym] the coaches and the members, how it feels, the energy and the atmosphere is the business, and you only truly achieve that when you are in person, making eye contact, seeing and feeling their energy, and sharing in that."

Raj: "It really depends on the business and it depends on the person. If a person wants a certain way to work, they've got to find a business that matches it, and if there's a business that needs to work in a certain way, they need to find the right person for that business. Sometimes, this may break because of things that change in their life, so there has to be an adjustment. Especially for women – they're so great in so many ways, but if you've got children and you've got to do childcare and somebody has to travel 25 miles to get to work, it's hard on a day to day basis. However – having some relationship with a work environment, whether it's once every 10 days, once every 7 days, it's healthy. You can't just be working from home 24/7."