

Podcast Episode #019
**A Real-Life Reinvention Story
with special guest Alex Roy**

[See the podcast episode online](#)

Announcer: Welcome to the Liftoff Project with Coach Pamela.

Pamela: Hi and welcome to the Liftoff Project. I'm Pamela Mitchell, your host and your coach, and this is the podcast devoted to helping you meld your professional self and your personal self into an enhanced version of your best self. My goal is to help you take control of your work and your life, feel more relaxed and confident, and experience the satisfaction and fulfillment of a sustainable, successful life.

Today's topic is a real life reinvention story, and here to share his journey is Alex Roy. Alex is from the world of cars. He is the author of *The Driver*. He's president of Europe by Car, and he's editor at large for the Drive.com. Alex and I have known each other many, many years, and during that time, I have watched his story unfold. He has some really compelling and powerful insights to share with us today. It's truly a remarkable story, so let's dive in and get this show started.

Hi, Alex, welcome today!

Alex: Hi, Pamela.

Pamela: Thank you so much for being here. I am really excited to have you. I gave this nice little summary before you and I started speaking, but there was one thing that I heard that I want to ask you about. I left that out in the little summary, and that was about some Cannonball Run records, so maybe you can start by telling us a little bit about that.

Alex: Well, the Cannonball Run was an illegal race which took place from 1971 through 1979, where several dozen drivers would shake hands and drive from New York to LA as quickly as they could, sometimes being chased by police. And when that ended in the early 80s, there were some follow on races, no one did it for twenty-five years. I went across with my friend David Maher in 2006 ... Oh, my God, seven, almost can't remember, and wrote a book about it. I went on Letterman, got arrested, became a



lecturer, and built my modern career on it. Just recently I had to add the word “former” to Cannon Ball Run record holder, because someone named Ed Bolian, a guy I had never met, went across and broke our time.

It's one of those things, setting this record and the notoriety around it, that was the hinge of my adult career. And then someone broke that record and it wasn't just that they had taken it from me, but my attitude is actually more like we're a part of a lineage. However infamous and wrong it might be, that's okay, because it's not who I am. It's just a thing I did.

Pamela: Right. That's actually a perfect segue into this whole topic of your reinvention story, because you talk about that being the catalyst to your adult modern career. Why don't you start by telling us what you were doing before, and why this thing captured your attention and put you on a new path?

Alex: Well, I could talk about that for about six hours, but I'll be good to you because I love you. I was running the family business, which is a car rental company called Europe by Car, and I'd been doing that for about ten years. My father had passed away. I had worked a long time for him, and I was about thirty, and I wanted to do something that was my own, but I couldn't walk away from the company. And so I just got it in my head, because it was something my father had wanted to do when he was young, that I was going to go do this Cannonball race, this illegal race. That somehow that would define me. I thought that was going to redefine me.

I spent years and a fortune, squandered a fortune maybe, but it depends on how you look at it, and broke that record. I became C- famous for a few months back in 2007, 2008. It actually became kind of a curse, because I became convinced that who I was and any respect I had earned was a result of that thing, of getting in a car and driving across the United States as quickly as possible, and doing so and getting away with it.

Then I guess I drank my own Kool-Aid, and that curse was the curse of letting myself be defined by one thing. My God, that was nine years ago, and I think I spent about two or three years in this euphoric state enjoying the fruits of it. I wrote a book. I did a book tour. I was doing a TV show and other things.

Then I literally drank the Kool-Aid. I got involved in night clubs. I started drinking and smoking, and living a very unhealthy lifestyle. Then, without question, and anyone who knew me saw this happening, I would say I started a downhill path. I stopped enjoying myself, my social life became me talking about me, doing things with people who were fans of mine, and just a complete turn inward. I mean it's almost a classic, a totally clichéd story.

Then I caught myself about two years ago. The reinvention wasn't the great success that I thought I had. It was making the decision before hitting rock bottom that I was going to change once again. Today, two years after making the decision that I was not defined by that, because “who I wasn't” also became defined by that, I realized and decided that I



wanted to continue doing things, I wanted to be defined over and over by new and constructive things. That was the reinvention, and that was the lesson of the record.

Pamela: Wow. There's so many layers in that that I want to unravel. The first piece is that this idea of reinvention. When the media talks about it, they tend to talk about it from a very superficial perspective. They talk about your career. You did one thing before and now you're doing another, but what they really miss is this whole interior level of a reinvention, that when we embark on a life change, that it requires us to grow in different ways. We don't know who we need to become in order to have the life that we want to have, and it sounds like that is really what happened to you. That, on its surface, you started to have this life that you thought you wanted to have, but inside it didn't fit.

Alex: I mean you and I talked about these things, because we had met some years ago while this was unfolding. In fact, we met even before the reinvention unfolded. What you say now hits me differently than it did back then, because I was in it, and I was unable to hear it, and I was unable to even take the flashlight you were trying to hand me and see a path forward. It wasn't darkness that I saw ahead. It was just this blaze of light. I wanted all of it, and that's not possible. Actually it is possible. It's just not realistic, because who we are is unfolding all the time, and you have to be happy with it and embrace it, or you can fight it all the time and never be happy.

The most interesting thing here goes straight to the heart to what you said. When I finally decided things were going to change, I wasn't going to sit and rest on prior laurels, which is destroying me, but those laurels ... There's no laurel that's ever enough to feed you for the rest of time. You can't eat a wreath. The wrapping paper of your Christmas presents is not nutritious, and yet, it is the thing we want all the time. It's just a waste.

I remember watching stories of people, alcoholics who were depressed, not clinically depressed, but I guess intellectually depressed, who are frustrated. And I was a person who had everything, maybe half I earned and half was given to me, and was at risk of losing it all, because of hubris, just hubris. One day, literally one day to the next, after many attempts to make a change, I woke up and I said, "Tomorrow I'm not going to smoke another cigarette, and I'm not going to do any more drugs, and I'm not going to drink any alcohol. I'm going to eat healthfully," and everyone says such a thing is impossible, but it isn't. I think for everyone it's different. What's at stake is different.

But, for me, as to how it happened, I'd say I woke up and I realized what I had valued was more powerful than what I enjoyed. I enjoyed day to day a cigarette, a drink, doing drugs, going out, hanging out with friends at a club. I enjoyed it, but it's not what I valued, and I took stock one day. I said, "If I don't fight for what I value, I won't even have what I enjoy." When I re-sequenced those things in my mind, it became really easy. I think it was no more than a month where I felt it was difficult, and I wouldn't say I suffered, but that I had this lust, and it was replaced by a love of working and starting over again. It was incredible.



I'd say for six or seven years I had let the things I valued evaporate and walked away from it, and then within two months, I sold one of the companies I was involved in, which I could no longer work in, and yet, I owned a piece. I was offered a stellar position at another company. I began getting up instead of at seven o'clock, at five thirty, and going to bed every day, no matter how tired I was, at eleven instead of two. Instead of trying to work eighteen hours a day, I began working sixteen, and working more ... I should say working better in those hours. Everything changed. Almost every person in my life in that era I thought was lost to me was always there. I had been the one unable to let them talk to me. I can honestly say ninety-nine percent was on me to turn things around.

No one can be helped, no one can change unless they make the choice. It sounds almost spiritual or religious, but I'm not a religious person, not at all, and I didn't go to see therapists. I saw a therapist a couple times, and I went to an AA meeting a couple times, but no one of these things was the key. But things you said to me lurked for years, because we had met so many years ago, and everything you said was true. You never told me what to do. You asked me questions about what I wanted and what was happening, and suggested I thread the needle myself. It took a lot longer than I would have hoped, but it did work.

Pamela: Love that! Here's the thing. If I were to pull out one key insight in what you just said, it's the idea that what you valued could not co-exist with what you enjoyed.

Alex: I think they can. If you're really lucky, they can dovetail, like a helix.

Pamela: Like a helix, and I say this as a person who has her own addictions. My addiction being food, which you have seen me struggle with over the years, and, thankfully, by grace, I have had a reprieve from that addiction. What I had to realize in this, and it sounds like the same is true for you, is the level of indulgence is what's important. Obviously I can't give up food, right? It's one of those things, unlike cigarettes or alcohol, where you can say "no more." You cannot say "no more" about food. It's more of a challenge in that regard, but still, there is a certain level that beyond which, they can't co-exist, because of my personality. What I had to say was, "Although there are other people that I see in the world who can have those two co-exist, I didn't get that gene in this lifetime. I'm not that girl. Maybe in my next lifetime I'll be that girl that can have a piece of cheesecake and still be a normal weight, but that's not me." That trigger will set me down a path.

It was really more about admitting who I was and what was required for me to have the life that I wanted, and it sounds like that's the same for you. Whether or not other people can have that, it's really taking a look at your own life, what you did, and say, "In order for me to have what I value, these other things cannot co-exist. I cannot indulge in both at this level and have it all."

Alex: I don't know how many listeners have played Dungeons and Dragons, or World of Warcraft, or any of the other role playing games, but it's like an opening position in chess. You cannot have every single outcome guaranteed, but, boy, can you mitigate



the downsides. With chess and video games, as anything in life, you could buy a truck, you could buy a sports car, you can even buy maybe an SUV, but you're not going to take that SUV racing. It's still a truck. You're not going to take that sports car off road. It's a sports car. You have to make choices. You have to, because a houseboat is not a very good house or a very good boat.

I'll speak from my own example. I could have that cigarette, but I smoked a lot, and if I'd like to live a reasonable life span, I have to stop. It is a choice. I mean, again, there are many kinds of addictions. There's psychological and medical, many kinds, but they're not all undefeatable. Some are things that just live with us, and then that's who we are. Again, my own experience. I'm not a doctor, but people can literally smell when someone is being productive, or proud of what they have just done, or walking away from something that's completed. They can see it on your face. They can smell it as you sit there, in the way you walk, in the tone of your voice.

Again, I'm not someone who follows Tony Robbins or any of these things, but these are common sense rules. I think when you and I met many years ago through the Moth, I was one person. Then I fell into a low point, and then I came back. Your reactions to me were always consistent in what you were saying, but totally different based on what you observed in me. We are better when we reflect what we're given, we reflect things around us, and people see things in us, and they're reinforcing positively and negatively. I must sound like a crazy person. None of these are things I ever would have said before. The only thing worse than lying to someone else personally and professionally is lying to oneself personally or professionally, because then you reinforce the worst aspects of the self that cannot remain fixed if one is actually to achieve the goal. That is the purpose of the lie.

Pamela: Right. That's right. Right, right, because the lie wants something, but the lie cannot be there if we really want to make it happen. We have to give up the lie, and that is the conundrum, right?

Alex: Yeah. Putting more wood on the fire, versus putting water. You know what I mean? The water isn't sitting next to the fire. You have to go get it.

Pamela: There's this really amazing poem. I think it's by Rumi or maybe even Hafez, one of the Sufi mystics, that talks about how when we look, we think that what is fire is water, and what is water is fire, and what we have to do is to go to the fire, and when we step into the fire, even though we think they're sparks, it is a relief. So it is that thing that we think is going to be the most painful that actually turns out to be our salvation, right? And that's the thing: giving up that addiction which feels like in the moment this very intense pain, ends up being the thing that opens up for us to have everything that we want to accomplish in our lives.

Alex: A thousand percent true, no doubt. I live in this beautiful loft in lower Manhattan, and although I can afford to stay in it, I have only just recently come to realize that there's so much history tied up in it that I should maybe not sell it, but rent it out, and



reinvent myself again by living in a very small apartment, maybe not even in Manhattan. I mean it's probably a wise financial decision, but more importantly, it's a much more valuable personal decision, because when one is laden with the choices of the past all the time, it casts a very big shadow and an unnecessary one. Change is really, really, really important.

I have this really great little sports car. I drive it. I have free parking at the office, and I love driving this car. By walking every single day, it's a much longer commute. But by walking, I get exercise. I run into someone every morning that I know, and often I meet people I don't know, but I see them every morning. We build a relationship. I'm healthier. I enjoy the weather. It costs me nothing, and yet, it's an invaluable change and gift I've given to myself. I mean it seems so trivial and superficial and gratuitous, unnecessary, but I've taken one pleasure and replaced it with another, and I love going to work every day.

Pamela: I love that! That brings up a very interesting question about reinvention, and that is this idea that in order to do something around it, that we have to give something else up.

Alex: Right. Is there a question attached to that, or do you want me to respond?

Pamela: You could just weigh in on that comment if you want.

Alex: I wrote an article last week about Tesla. Tesla is coming out with this new Model X, this hundred and forty-thousand-dollar SUV, which has these falcon doors that rise up like a falcon. Sexiest thing ever. I actually use the houseboat analogy. I hate SUVs, bad houses, bad boats. You can't have it all, but maybe you can, and so I talk about this Tesla, which I really love, but when you think about it, for the price of a Tesla, a hundred and forty thousand dollars, you could buy seven Ford F150s, to effectively do exactly the same thing. They're going to pollute more, and they're not going to be electric, and they're going to make more noise, but really, for twenty thousand dollars you can have something that does the same thing. You do have to make choices.

Having it all and what "all" is, is in our mind. You think you need a vehicle that's electric, for whatever reason. You want to save the environment, energy and dependence, to be cool, and you really need to have something that has falcon doors, and you need something no one else has, and you need to show people you've got the money. You have to own a Tesla. It's a great car without a question. You need to own it. But the guy who just needs to haul a bunch of boxes can get by for twenty thousand dollars. He has it all. You know what I mean? You choose, you choose to define what "all" is for you, and that is a very important lesson. What "all" is, all is nothing. What is important is whatever is necessary. Anything is possible, but not everything is necessary. Like the car you drive. All watches tell the time; all cars get there. What are you going to drive and why? It's in your mind.



Pamela: That's right. It's all in your mind, all of it. All of it that we create is in your mind. That's the thing.

Let me ask you, what did you wish you had known before you started on this journey?

Alex: Well, again, some clichés are true, many just for a reason. Now that I'm working at the Drive.com, Times' automotive division, I have this hilarious card. I never thought I'd have a card from a major corporation that said I had any real position, Editor at Large, which is totally vague, but it's great. It's cool. I love the job.

But you get to the office, and I go in if I want to, which is hilarious, and then my boss, whom I love, says to me, "Stop worrying about this article. You're only as good as the last good piece." I write a couple of columns a week, and I sit there and I agonize over the opening line. I agonize every eight hundred words or a thousand words. This is true for almost any job, not just journalism. You're only as good as the last good thing that you put out. Ten bad things are going to cost you, but you're one great milestone from success, always. Maybe not your own definition of success, but the next step towards it, and success is a thousand small steps or ten medium ones. It's very rare for there to be a big one, unless you get a lottery ticket, and with that lottery ticket, the odds are against you.

But the odds against making a small step tomorrow are very small. If you make a small step every single day, you will get there. It's virtually guaranteed, and that's the thing. That's the thing.

Pamela: Great!

Alex: I thought if I sat and waited, that one day a big choice would come. Someone would hand me a piece of paper and say, "Sign or don't sign. Be smart, and it's going to happen," or book sales would mystically spike, or a TV producer would have called me and said, "You've got a show." None of that happened. In fact, while I was waiting, all the things that happened before fell apart.

I hit the home run. I chose something, to go across country. I chose to do it probably because I had flawed logic. I believed that if I did this one thing, which took thirty-one hours to drive from New York to LA, at the end of thirty-one hours, I would have skipped the thousand small steps. And I came real close, but it wasn't enough because it never would have been enough, because that was the fallacy. That was the lesson. You could go cross country and expect a career out of it, even if you set the record, even with a book deal and getting on David Letterman and all these things, because without the thousand small steps, there was no career to be had. No TV show, no second book. Just eleven minutes of fame.

Now, the record has almost evaporated in the public mind. It's almost ten years ago, but now, after two years of plugging away, writing articles, everyday huffing a little bit, I'm



much closer to what I wanted than I was nine years ago, the day after David Letterman. And that's the lesson.

Pamela: Just to wrap up, because this has been an incredible conversation, what advice would you have for people who are contemplating their own reinvention or maybe are sitting at this moment saying, "What should I do? Should I get off the fence? Should I move ahead?"

Alex: My father said something to me that I thought was a joke and it wasn't. He said, "Do they pay your rent?" It implies if they don't pay your rent, what they think means nothing, nothing. I have friends and I wake up sometimes and I see they've moved to California. They're in startups. Some of them are very successful, work at Facebook, sold their companies to Google, and when I go see them, they are conflicted with exactly the same problems as everyone else. They want to be in love, want kids. A backache, go to the doctor.

Of course, money makes things easier, but if money is the end result alone, they would be happy, because money has no end. You have to pick a personal goal, whatever it is, and fight for it every day, and make sure you carve out that downtime, a few hours a week at least, to think about something other than the goal. Because the goal has no value outside the context of a broader life, and who you are can never be restricted to one thing.

If you think you're working, and you're really not, you'll never get there. That treading water is a mistake.

Pamela: Oh, my God, I love that. I love you. This is just such an awesome conversation. Thank you, Alex!

Alex: I owe a big piece of it to you. I didn't see it at the time, but looking back, I can almost fill in your half of the conversation from so many years of talking.

Pamela: Well, I'm so glad that we arrived at this moment to be able to have this conversation, and really to be able to share it with people to help others on their journey, so thank you.

Alex: Thank you, Pamela.

Pamela: I loved that conversation. It was so amazing! If you want to learn more about Alex, you can check him out at AlexRoy144.com, and you can find him at AlexRoy144 on all social media platforms.

That's it for this segment of the Liftoff Project. Be sure to visit our website, the Liftoff Project.com/podcast, where you can download a transcript of today's episode. If you have a question for an upcoming segment of Ask Coach Pamela, go to the LiftoffProject.com/question and leave me a voice mail. If I answer your question in a



future episode, I'll send you a free deck of reinvention cards as a gift, so scoot on over there and leave me a voice mail.

You can also connect with me on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram @TheCoachPamela, and if you enjoyed this episode, please leave a review for us on iTunes. Your feedback truly does make a difference.

Today's Liftoff inspiration comes from John F. Kennedy, who says, "We should not let our fears hold us back from pursuing our hopes." If you've been on the fence, step off and pursue your hopes. Thanks for listening today, and remember, why settle for good when great is waiting? Take one small step this week to lift your life. Bye for now.

©2011 THE REINVENTION INSTITUTE; ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
Reproduction of this content, in whole or in part, without written permission is prohibited.

