

Ally van de Pol

Owner and Managing Director at China White Limited
Head Conditioning Coach & Holistic Nutritionist
at Dragon Fitness and Coaching



Starting out as a marketing and business development professional, Ally has gained more than 20 years' experience providing clients with marketing and consulting advice. Always challenging herself, she set up her own company, China White Limited in Hong Kong in 2010.

Your professional life has taken many turns, and now you have set up two businesses in two totally different fields. Can you tell us more about your story?

Life has been full of surprises for me! I began my career as a marketing professional in the UK. Then about 14 years ago, I lost my job and was invited by a friend living in Hong Kong to visit for a holiday. I spent ten days exploring the city and fell in love with it. I've never looked back. It wasn't easy – I arrived with a couple of suitcases, and life was tough in the first year; I started off teaching English to children to pay the bills and to gain a work visa. Since then, I have worked in several companies, building up my career before opening my own marketing consultancy business, China White Limited. All went well, but deep down it wasn't my true calling.

So what drives me in running Dragon Fitness and Coaching, which I set up four years ago? I have been involved in fitness

all my life. It started off with gymnastics as a kid, then I took up athletics in my teenage years, I've played netball for HKCC, and was a white collar boxer, so fitness has always been my passion. A friend asked me one day, "Ally, you're so good at fitness, why don't you become a personal trainer?" I thought why not as it has always been something I thought I would like to do, and then my husband gave me a training course as a birthday gift.

I'm really glad I made that move. I now have a personal training gym and a lovely group of clients who I consider friends. So I am now a certified personal trainer, a holistic nutrition coach, and I'm also studying to be a naturopath. I really like coaching people, and it makes me happy helping others and knowing I am making a difference in their lives.

Unlike other businesses which can usually be run using emails or phone, personal coaching requires you to be physically present. Does this make managing your time difficult?

Striking a balance definitely isn't easy. I have to put myself first a lot of the time, as I have to be in a good place in order to help others. I have two step-daughters (one lives at home) and five dogs, and I have to be available when they need me, especially my daughter, who's 18 and in her last year of school. I have to allocate my time effectively, including not going out as often as I used to and keeping social media mainly for work, balancing home and family commitments as well as full time work, running a business and studying, plus of course training myself. It's a real juggling game but I really enjoy it.

Prioritisation is very important to me. I have seen quite a lot of my clients, especially those with families, putting everyone else first, so much so that they ultimately suffer themselves. Don't forget to "put on your own oxygen mask before helping others".

I can see you have now found your dream career, and are continuing to build on it. Looking back, have there been setbacks or discouraging situations, and what lessons have you learned?

I came to Hong Kong because I was made redundant in the UK. I had

worked in the marketing industry for 10 years by then, but Hong Kong is a totally different landscape. I began by teaching children for a year. I really wasn't into it, but I knew I had to be humble and persistent. I had to deal with mismatches in my career until I found a role that really suited me. I've been fired twice!

In a way, the discouraging situations have made me do a lot of things that I wouldn't have done otherwise. I strongly believe that when one door closes, another one opens. You have to take advantage of every opportunity, and treat opportunities as stepping stones. Sometimes setbacks are blessings in disguise.

Looking back, moving to Hong Kong was a risk. But here I am, 14 years later, having set up my own businesses and doing what I absolutely love. I believe that life gives you enough challenges to make you a better person, but not so many as to break you. So never give up, life will eventually send you in the right direction.

What advice would you give to women who want to pursue their own passions, but have to struggle just to maintain the status quo?

You only live once, so why don't you follow your gut instinct? I understand some people embrace change and others find it very difficult. There are always ups and downs in life, and you can never tell whether the move you

make will be absolutely the right one, but if you don't try, you'll never know. Sometimes you have to take that one chance in your life. I sold everything I had in the UK before moving to Hong Kong, and I have never regretted it.

I believe in trusting your instincts - if you feel it's the right thing to do, then go ahead! It might only be a small, incremental move, but you never know what it might bring, or who it will introduce you to. Do something you're passionate about, and seek out things that inspire you; something that wakes you up in the morning and motivates you. One day you will be surprised by what life brings and how far you have come.

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