

'People hate my guts', says ex-MP Steve Baker on private sector comeback



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Former minister Steve Baker has ruled out returning to frontline politics except in the most “extraordinary circumstances” as he makes his comeback in the private sector after a “bruising” 14 years as a [Conservative](#) MP.

Mr Baker – previously [Northern Ireland](#) minister and a hardline [Brexit](#)er – said it would have to be a big enough role for him to go back into government, describing his time as MP for [Wycombe](#) as being “shocking from one end to the other”.

Having lost his seat to Labour in the general election, Mr Baker quit politics and is now returning to the commercial sector with aims to channel his experience of “living in the teeth of ferocious disagreements” into the corporate world.

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another

Steve Baker, former Northern Ireland minister and ex-MP

He has teamed up with London School of Economics professor and author Paul Dolan to launch a new consultancy aiming to help firms navigate the challenges of groupthink and “beliefism” – those who are intolerant of people or perspectives that differ from their own.

Mr Baker said: “Hundreds of thousands of people hate my guts over one issue or another and I am accustomed to it.

“But when organisations face groupthink and beliefism, trouble can follow, innovation and productivity fall and competitiveness suffers.”

Mr Baker tested the water on beliefism at the recent Conservative party conference and said when he mentioned it “the room stopped and wrote it down”.

His appearance at the conference led to questions over whether he was planning a return to politics – something Mr Baker strongly denies.

“For me to return to elected office would require the most extraordinary circumstances,” he told the PA news agency.

“Even if a Prime Minister, or rather a leader of the opposition, said to me: ‘We think we’re gonna win this one, Steve, we want you in the cabinet’, after everything I’ve done, quite honestly, I’d be asking: ‘Which job?’

“Because I wouldn’t go back to all the trouble of being elected for one of the smaller cabinet jobs, as honouring as that would be.”

For now, he is concentrating on using his experiences to help businesses.

Through their new firm, called The Provocation [People](#), Mr Baker and Mr Dolan plan to help firms to feel empowered to embrace differences in opinion, and even hostility.

Mr Baker said: "I've spent 14 years living in the teeth of ferocious disagreements and I've always tried to disagree in a civil fashion.

"It's been naturally in my character to kind of try and get on with people even where I disagree with them. I don't want animosity."

As well as his hardline stance in support of Brexit, Mr Baker also courted controversy with his fierce opposition to repeated Covid lockdowns at the height of the pandemic.

He said beliefism was "very evident" during those years.

"Before you know it, they're calling me a denier and I'm the embodiment of evil."

If we're going to get ourselves out of the productivity puzzle... then we need to be truly celebratory of different perspectives

Paul Dolan, LSE professor

He said those years in the spotlight as a minister took their toll on his mental health, which is a topic he has talked about openly.

"Almost every aspect of being a politician shocked me," he told PA.

"Everything from the sheer volume of work that goes through Parliament to the way that people talk to their representatives. It was just shocking from one end to the other."

"I am an introvert who doesn't much like conflict," he

insisted.

“I prefer to get along with everyone.”

He is hoping to use his experience and Mr Nolan’s expertise on behavioural science to bring harmony to firms facing hostility.

“That will be a prize for me personally worth winning after a very bruising 14 years in which I’ve talked about the depths of mental health issues, which I suffered as a result.

“I would like to make the world a better place and I think I’m better off doing that with Paul (Dolan) than I am going back into politics.”

They hope that through their advice, firms can tackle groupthink to drive innovation and productivity and ultimately boost profits.

Mr Dolan said: “There isn’t a single company that isn’t subject to the vagaries of groupthink, and if we’re going to get ourselves out of the productivity puzzle... then we need to be truly celebratory of different perspectives.”