

James Butler's Newsletter #4 December 02

Merry Christmas All!

Some of us will be in the last few hectic days before a few weeks off, others will still be avoiding the office junior from Finance after the Christmas party, and yet others will be praying that our favourite football team or national cricket team receive "How to Win" in their Christmas stocking. Whatever applies to you, I hope you have a great Christmas and New Year. In this festive newsletter I have put together:

- top tips on surviving Christmas (and the visit of the relatives)
- New Year Resolution Guide - making sure you keep your promises to yourself
- media mentions - "Topless Model as Coach or Guru" and other stories.....
- my usual brand of humour.....

Surviving Christmas

With just one week to go until the festive season, tempers are already fraying and stress levels are already building in homes across the land. Some people flee the country just to avoid the family arguments! As Christmas hots up and your blood pressure boils more than the brussels sprouts, remember these thoughts:

- It is always better to give than to receive - though it is never an acceptable excuse that you wanted to allow your partner the pleasure of only giving, and not receiving, presents this year. Get your joy this Christmas from giving to others, do not measure it in terms of the gifts you received.
- Take a walk this Christmas - this has the double benefit of easing digestion of the Christmas dinner as well as providing some exercise to wear off all those extra calories. It is also very useful if taken just before you were going to throttle your nephew as he whinged about his presents one more time.....
- Seek first to understand. As we spend time with relatives or in-laws a pressure cooker of idiosyncrasies and unacceptable beliefs can build up. Maintain your own calm and gain brownie points by seeking to understand the viewpoints of others, rather than launching into arguments. Remember that discretion can be the better part of valour.
- Be thankful. As your mother in law criticises your cooking for the 14th time, remember those less fortunate who do not have loved ones, or family, around them this Christmas. However, should you feel yourself on the verge of despatching your in-laws to the local soup kitchen in order to share the joy of their company with those less fortunate, please read the second and third points above.

- Remember a rift can be for life, not just for Christmas. Is it ever worth it? Walk away, count calmly to ten, remember how much you love the other person, pretend to fall asleep in front of Ben Hur - do whatever it takes to defuse the moment.

I am sure you all realise that these family-argument caricatures are based on stereotypes and bear no resemblance to any characters known to me, living or dead.

New Year Resolution Guide

More seriously, the festive period is a great time for reflection over the events of the last year and an opportunity to really set yourself up for the New Year. I would love for you to think through a few of these points and really springboard your life in 2003!

1. Reflect on 2002 and celebrate your successes. Write them down. Did you watch less TV, save more of your salary, smoke less cigarettes, change jobs, move house, start a new relationship, get out of an old bad one? Don't take your achievements for granted - stop and appreciate them!
2. Create 5 or so specific dreams for 2003 - reflect on what it will be like when you achieve those goals. Be as descriptive as you can. Leading UK coach Rachel Turner talks about creating "character sketches" of yourself that will provide a compelling vision for you next year. Really go to town on how you will look, act, feel and think when you achieve those goals. Keep that vision in a place you can and will refer to frequently.
3. Identify the key steps you need to take in the next 3 months to make those dreams a reality - either general movement forward or very specific tasks - realise how you are going to get from A to B.
4. Commit to yourself that you will review all your actions on a weekly and daily basis to make sure they reflect these priorities. Don't let yourself be distracted from these important goals by day-to-day events. Stay true to that longer term vision you've created.
5. Get support - make sure your partner, or a friend, or a coach is available to support you if the going gets tough, or to share a success with you. Ensure you have the right support in terms of training, tools or equipment for you to achieve your vision.
6. Track progress - check in with you sheet of visions regularly and make sure you are on track, or even ahead. If life throws up surprises (it has a habit of doing that), redouble your efforts to get back on track.
7. Be sure to celebrate and reward success. As you make progress towards your vision, give yourself credit for what you achieve and treat yourself as a reward. Just be sure your treat honours your vision - no quick packet of 10 for those giving up smoking etc!

8. Stop to smell the roses. Many of us who are keen on personal development are always looking for the next step to improve ourselves, achieve the next career step, make the next million (I wish), etc. remember the journey should be just as much fun as arriving, so be sure to take stock occasionally and really appreciate the situation you're in now. Perhaps stop and list 25 things you have to be grateful for. And then be grateful for them!

9. Maybe this would be best first..... Never, ever, set yourself a vision or New Year Resolution that is really someone else's. Don't lose weight because your partner wants you to, do it for yourself or not at all. Setting ourselves other people's hurdles is setting ourselves up to trip. Make your life easier by honouring your own vision.

10. If you fall off the wagon, just get back on! Far better to start over than to wait until next 31 December to think about it. And remember that Henry Ford said " Failure is the opportunity to begin again, more intelligently."

Media Mentions

Prima Magazine featured coach Bill Ford, with some tips on boosting energy levels over the festive period. In the article, Bill gave advice to a daughter, mother and grandmother ranging from 25 to 70. These ideas were largely drawn from Bill's recent book *High Energy Habits* (Pocket Books £7.99).

The biggest media mentions around coaching have, however, been reserved for Carole Caplin, friend and guru to Cherie Blair and the girlfriend of Peter Foster - the now infamous conman who became involved in the Blair's purchase of property in Bristol. The whole saga is perfect for tabloid journalists - particularly given Carole's previous career as a 'glamour model', and her alleged fee of £5,000 per month. The press have also picked up on Carole's role in the Blair's life - as a fitness and lifestyle 'guru'. Some have compared this to coaching, given the perception of both as 'New Age' and alternative.

It should be noted that the majority of coaching is nothing like the service reportedly provided to Cherie Blair. The majority of coaches do not become involved in personal training, wardrobe selection, crystal cleaning, two in the shower romps, property dealing or whatever else has been claimed in the sometimes imaginative British media. Coaching as practiced by most coaches, including me, is more about working with clients on creating a vision and action plan for a better life, personally or professionally, and on developing a supportive infrastructure of accountability which aids the client in achieving that vision.

Rumours that I will be holding future coaching sessions in the shower are untrue!

Humour for New Year

Thank you for those who have suggested one of my resolutions should be to include at least one funny 'joke' this year. Here is a humorous take on New Year Resolutions:

"As we all prepare to start a new year, it is time again to make those ever so important New Year's Resolutions. I have faithfully made such resolutions in the past, and while I haven't been able to keep all of them, I have tried my best to continue making progress on them year after year. Following is my revised list of "New Year's Resolutions - 2001 Edition":

Resolution #1

1998: I will try to be a better husband to Susan.
1999: I will not leave Susan.
2000: I will try for a reconciliation with Susan.
2001: I will try to be a better husband to Debbie.

Resolution #2

1998: I will read at least 20 good books a year.
1999: I will read at least 10 books a year.
2000: I will read 5 books a year.
2001: I will finish the Sunday Paper once a month.

Resolution #3

1998: I will get my weight down below 13st.
1999: I will watch my calories until I get below 14st.
2000: I will follow my new diet religiously until I get below 16st.
2001: I will try to develop a realistic attitude about my weight."

I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a healthy and prosperous New Year. May 2003 bring you all the success you hope for.

Warmest Regards

James Butler

"Realise your potential"

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