

James Butler's Newsletter #28

Amuse, Inform and Inspire

December 2004

Last month we considered reviewing your goals for 2004 and seeing if you could complete before the end of the year. Now, with just a few weeks to go, I hope you have made some progress.

As regular readers will know, my clients are often an inspiration for topics for the newsletter, and this month is no different. Just recently, I have worked with a couple of different clients on improving their communication with colleagues in their business, their prospects and with others they interact with.

Do It in Style

There are many ways to improve our communication with others, enough to keep me going in newsletters for a few months, but I am going to pick up on two broad concepts that might help you improve your communication skills. With Christmas coming up, that might just come in handy, as you have a "discussion" with your spouse over the in-laws visiting, or if you have to explain yourself to colleagues the day after the Christmas party!

I believe that many problems in communication come from a misunderstanding – often arising from the two protagonists having differing styles of communicating. If we want our communication to be effective, especially in business, it is important to understand our own style, recognise the style used by others and modify our approach accordingly.

Since the summer I have been using a tool called the PCSI to help people understand the communication style of themselves and people in their business. Once people can see their own style, and some other people's, they can quickly determine how best to communicate with them. The PCSI delineates four styles, and gives tips on how those styles communicate. Let me explain the four styles and it might become clearer.

Director:- these people like to be in control and happily accept challenges. They tend to be fast-paced, results focussed and will make quick decisions and follow through. They're not always best at taking instruction from others and are easily bored.

Presenter:- these people like to be the life and soul of a party – they like to be up front talking to people. They are full of ideas, often go off at tangents and can't spell detail, let alone check it. They want everything to be fun and can be unreliable regarding commitments.

Mediator:- these people care a lot about others and are sought out because they care. They tend to be reserved and prefer being out of the limelight, but tend to become experts in their field. They breed a culture of trust but can tend to put their own needs last so often they suffer.

Analyst:- these people are risk-averse and are expert at solving problems and excel in technical roles. Process is very important to them and they like to know everything before making a decision. They like structure and get frustrated when others are unreliable.

Can you see yourself in there? It is likely you will show characteristics of more than one, though most people are dominant in one or two styles. If you would like to work with me on an assessment (just £40 for the workbook and a follow-up session on the outcomes), give me a call on 01491 659073.

So, how is this useful? Well, if you are having trouble getting through to or on with someone at work, work out your own preferred style and try and see what their style

would be. If there is a mis-match, that could be part of the problem. If you want to communicate more effectively with them, try to modify your styles to match theirs – and watch what happens.

For example, Bob manages a small team. Bob is a Director, with a bit of Analyst thrown in. The Director piece makes him authoritarian, sure he is right and a leader. The analyst in him means he likes technical data and always expects tasks to be completed.

Suzie is the sales person within the team. She is gregarious, open and great at building relationships with customers. She is good for business, regularly bringing in big contracts. She just can't be doing with all this detail about sales reports, QA systems and structure. She is a Presenter. Bob and Suzie are at loggerheads!!

If Bob wanted to improve the way he worked with Suzie, he might look to help her express her talents for sales without repressing her with reports and systems. He might look for ways for him to get the information he needs in a more suitable way.

If Suzie wanted to get on better with Bob, she might recognise his need for data and to be bossy, and just go with the flow and get her assistant to give him loads of reports and stats. She could then get on with the party, selling to the punters!

I hope this illustrates how an understanding of the style we prefer to use, and the style used by others, can help us communicate more effectively with others. Consider which styles you use most often, and then think about those preferred by members of your team at work (or your key clients if you work on your own). Armed with that knowledge, what will you do differently from now on?

See No Evil, Hear No Evil, Feel No Evil

As well as communication style, another difference between each of us that can hamper communication is the way that we represent the world within our own heads. We each tend to favour one or two of the senses more strongly than the others.

A visual person will see things in their head, an auditory person will hear lists or dialogue and a touch-based person will feel the emotion or energy in a situation. By listening for clues in their language and talking in their sensory perception, we make it easier for them to understand.

For example, someone who says "I see what you are saying, but let's have a look at this another way" will be visual, so any discussion with them will be better phrased in visual terms. Someone else who says "That sounds sensible, but you're not hearing my point of view" is more likely to be auditory and would respond better to that type of language.

A third person might say "That doesn't feel right, how can we get a grip on this?", giving you clues that they are touch-based (this is called kinaesthetic). They would respond to feelings-based language, and even appropriate physical contact like a hand on the arm.

Can you imagine if your perception and someone else's were different? It might be like this:

"Mum, I can't see why you can't accept my view on going away at Christmas." (Visual)

"OK Sarah, let us talk about it" (Auditory)

"Why? The picture's clear from where I'm looking." (Still Visual)

"If you would only discuss it, it sounds like you don't care about us." (Oh dear, still

Auditory!)

How long could this go on?

By raising our awareness of the way in which others represent the world in their own mind (by listening for clues in their language), we can become more aware of better ways to communicate with them. This is something I try to bring to my coaching (I'll leave my clients to comment on my level of success!), but also to sales negotiations and other interactions.

I don't try it at home, but that's because Bev is an ex-teacher and as well as eyes in the back of her head she has an extra sensory perception of when I am trying to be clever. I've learnt not to experiment!

How can you use the knowledge about PCSI communication styles and sensory perception to improve your own effectiveness in communication?

What could be different in your life if you could improve your communication with key people?

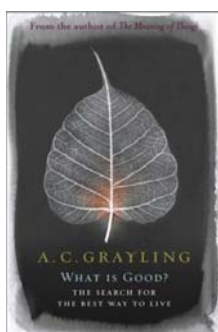
Painless Business News

I'm pleased to say that the first draft of the book is finished and has been sent off for review. In a way it feels like closure, because it was a big thing to get done, but I also know it is going to come back in the New Year and there will be a lot of work to get it to the final edit. However, it will be worth it when it is out on the market!

The most recent Painless Business Workshop took place in late November. The delegates discussed Taking the Fear Out of Money with myself and fellow coach Helen Krag. The usual mix of hard work and good humour (not my jokes, as you know) helped to bring some light to the subject. We know have a short break until 23 February, when we will be considering Building A Dream Team – with one. This will be looking at that age old problem in small business – one person doing it all. Is that the only way? Come and hear Helen and I explore the alternatives!

My subscriber numbers are edging towards my target for the year, another 10 should do it. If you could just organise amongst yourselves who is going to ask a friend to subscribe, that would be excellent! ;o)

Book Review



Still not a lot of reading as I have been focussed on the book, but the Christmas period will be a great time to catch up, so expect a few thrillers to be reviewed next month!

I did buy the DVD of Forrest Gump recently, which I think is a great film. It took a lot of self control when I visited Washington not to plunge into the pond on the Mall yelling "Jenny!". Having seen the film again recently, my clients should be on the look out for the "Life is just a box of chocolates" line in our sessions!

On the other end of the intellectual spectrum, my bedtime reading at the moment is "What is Good" by AC Grayling. The book explores what is the best way to live – by analysing the thoughts of societies and religions through the ages from the Ancient Greeks to the late 20th Century. Not an easy read (have a dictionary handy), but I am learning a lot!

Painless Puns

The following inspiring thoughts have landed in my Inbox this month. I like the first because I am an incurable optimist!

In the long run, the pessimist may be proved to be right, but the optimist has a better time on the trip. Daniel L. Reardon

Make happy those who are near, and those who are far will come. Chinese Proverb

You know how I like mother-in-law jokes? I get away with them because I have a step-mother-in-law (and they're much nicer), so this joke really tickled me. And guys, don't try this at home!

Last night the doorbell rang, and when I opened the door, there was my mother-in-law in the front porch. She said, "Can I stay here for a few days?"

I said, "Of course, you can," and shut the door.

Just think of that one when the in-laws are staying for Christmas!

Final Words

It has been an interesting experience to write this issue, largely because it has been done in airport departure lounges and on trains as I travelled to and from Edinburgh on business. I have discovered a whole new side to my Palm Pilot.

Whilst this newsletter has focused on 2004 and 2005, the idea of goal planning and review works just as well over longer periods. I am due to return next month to the scene of my first real goal setting exercise as a trainee coach (in 2002). At that time, I pictured a coaching business by 2006. It looks like I am ahead of schedule!

Warmest regards

James Butler

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