

James Butler's Newsletter #40

Amuse, Inform and Inspire

December 2005

I guess my first task this month is to wish you all "Happy Holidays", whatever your beliefs about Christmas, Hanukkah and so on. In most countries around the world this is a time to reflect, spend time with family and renew oneself before another year. In some parts of my country, it also seems a time to drown your house and garden in tacky flashing lights and inflatable Homer Simpsons dressed as Father Christmas, but I have yet to work out the religious significance of that!

The last month has placed me in a reflective mood for this newsletter. A number of friends or relatives have been unwell, and sadly we lost one friend to cancer. Throughout that time, I have really come to realise how we all touch each others lives and the impact we can have on others without realising – leaving a legacy far more powerful than our financial estate.

What is your legacy?

Wherever we go, we leave an impression. That can be a physical one – a footprint on the moon, a book written, a building created – or a more esoteric one - a smile on someone's face, a change in someone's awareness, an opportunity created. We cannot escape the fact that what we do every day has an impact somewhere.

Now, we can either see that as a huge responsibility and burden, or we can see it as an enormous opportunity to leave the world a better place after we have passed. I am sure you can guess which I prefer!

We could always leave to chance what impression, or legacy, we leave behind. But what a waste! Surely it is far better to create an intention of what impression we want to leave – by thinking it through and living by our intention. At this time of year, many of you will be reviewing progress for 2005 and setting goals for 2006 (and I encourage you to do so), but I would also encourage you to think what legacy you want to leave in 2006.

And I don't think legacy is necessarily about what we leave after we die (though that is the normal definition), I think it is what we leave behind every day of our lives.

If you accept that your legacy is the impression you leave on a daily basis, the first place to start in setting our intention for what that legacy will be is our actions every day. Having a clear intention of what you will do in a day, and how that relates to your broader purpose in life, allows you to take action that moves you forward. And it allows you to recognise those actions that take you away from that intention (and we all fall off the wagon from time to time!) – and perhaps reduce them.

But our impression is far more about how we do things than what we do. Some people believe that our spirit lives on after our death in the image and memory that people have of us. This could also apply before we die. My own legacy from yesterday is rooted less in the work I did at my desk, and more in the chats I had with clients, people I met in my village, communities around the world I am working with etc. So my most important measure of how I make an impression is how I conduct myself with others. We will each have our own standards for what that is.

When we gathered to celebrate the life of our friend Colin, his friends and family remembered his geniality, his generosity and his love for others. His impact on the world will carry on, even though he has left us, because many have learnt from and been inspired by his example. What an amazing impression to create.

"Consider Yourself"

A lyric from Oliver Twist seems seasonally appropriate! How can we ensure we create the impression or legacy we want? In recent days I have been asking myself the same question, and this is the process I followed – it may be of use to you. Feel free to hum "Consider Yourself" as you read it.

1. Consider the impression you want to create. Think of those who have touched your life and left a good impression – what would you like to emulate? An exercise to do this is to imagine yourself at your 80th birthday party, and imagine what you would want guests to be saying about you and how you have lived your life. (You can imagine your own funeral, but I prefer a party!).
2. Consider how you interact with others – is it consistent with the impression you want to create? Do you treat others as you would wish to be treated yourself? Do you consistently meet your own standard for dealing with others (You have to define that standard as it will be different for each of us)?
3. Consider anything that contributes to you deviating from that standard – particular situations, certain people, a minimum number of vodka cocktails – and look for ways to minimise the risk of being knocked off course.
4. Consider what you can create that will have an impact on others – that could be charitable giving (and that doesn't just mean money), it could be starting a project in an area that interests you, it could be raising other people's awareness about something.
5. Consider what standard you want to hold yourself to every day in order to create the ongoing impression you want to leave behind. I believe we can all easily find three actions a day that will leave an impression or legacy.
6. Consider at the end of each day how you have kept to that standard. Congratulate yourself on success (and I suggest keeping a journal of those successes) and learn from times when you fall short. Not succeeding is only a failure if we don't learn for next time.
7. Finally, consider yourself at home, consider yourself one of the family. OK, that was me bursting into song!

What impression will you create in 2006?

Painless Business News

The Painless website continues to be upgraded and remodelled. Web guru Christina has now added a News and Events page and we have a programme of promotion and development for 2006. A key aim is to meet our target for the number of people reading the newsletter, so your ongoing support in spreading the word is much appreciated.

One of my workshops in December was rescheduled for January, so if you are interested in How To Find Your Ideal Client (By Name!) and are able to attend a workshop in Oxford on the 16th January, please get in touch in the New Year.

This week I have completed a piece of work for a client bringing together staff and directors and forging a new vision for the company. The work also included developing better relations between everyone in the team – understanding how we each communicate differently and developing some ground rules for working together. For a few days work, I believe they will be starting 2006 with far greater zest than might have been the case. If your business could benefit from a similar exercise, I would be delighted to talk through what we could do together.

Painless Puns

As usual, a few thoughts that have inspired me this month:

If someone does not smile at you, be generous and offer your own smile. Nobody needs a smile more than one who cannot smile at others. Unknown

Let us act on what we have, since we have not what we wish. John Henry Newman

Before preparing to improve the world, first look around your own home three times.
Chinese Proverb

A barman recently challenged me and offered a free drink if I could name a cocktail he didn't know how to make. "OK" I said, "Make me a Rotterdam". "I don't believe it" he replied (actually he said something else, but the email filters wouldn't let that through). "How do you make a Rotterdam?"

"Easy, all you need is a large port."

And many of you will know that port happens to be my favourite tippel!

Final Words

The Painless office closes today for the Christmas break. Carol will be checking emails and phone messages, but I will be offline until January 3rd. During that time I will be reflecting on achievements this year (book published, running a marathon, undreamt of success with our charity fundraising) and dreaming of achievements for next year (another book perhaps, another marathon – certainly not!). I may also squeeze in a glass of the finest South African Sauvignon Blanc and raise a toast to all of you. I hope you have all achieved great things this year and I thank you for sharing my journey.

Warmest regards

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