

# James Butler's Newsletter #48

Amuse, Inform and Inspire

August 2006

Some developments in my own business this month have caused me to consider the Shakespeare quote "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." Like many pieces of good literature, this can be interpreted in many ways. In my context, it is the metaphor of our lives as stage productions that interests me.

In business, we daily stage performances for our customers – we create their customer experience. We can either allow that performance to progress ad hoc and uncontrolled, or we can attempt to script, produce and improve it.

## *As You Like It*

This is the title of Shakespeare's work from which the quote is taken. In terms of your customer's experience – how do YOU like it? Perhaps more importantly, how would your customers like it?

**Create the experience:-** we want our customers to be totally absorbed in the experience – so they stay longer, spend more and come back. Just think when you were last absorbed in a theatre production or movie – that is what we want to create. What contributes to that?

**Write the script:-** with feedback from customers and your own perceptions, you can decide how you want the production to progress. A script isn't just words – it includes stage directions, prop lists and instructions for emphasis. Do you have that for your customer experience?

**Control the set:-** to create the right experience, everything has to be in its place. A Stage Manager will ensure the props are way they need to be, when they need to be. Everything placed on the stage will have a purpose – to create a dramatic setting or effect. Does everything that your customer sees have a purpose?

**Remove the negative cues:-** often the distinction between an amateur production and a professional show will be that professionals act the whole time they are on stage, amateurs tend to act only when they have lines. In business, we must remember we are always on stage, and any time the customer sees us, we need to be consistent with the brand we are portraying. Do you and all your staff act appropriately all the time? What little things might you be doing to undermine your brand?

## *Are we merely players?*

As someone with a science background, philosophy is not a natural hunting ground, but Shakespeare's quote has me thinking on another level. Are we merely players, directed by someone else, or can we control some or part of our outcomes? Even if we believe in a higher force (which some people call God), do we have no responsibility for the production we call our lives?

**Do you write your script?** What control do you try to take over your life? Are you trying to write the script, or do you take what life presents? In my 4 years of coaching, I have found those who try to exercise some control over their future find themselves more fulfilled and successful (however they define that), even if external events still radically affect their course.

**If you don't, what drives you to do that?** What beliefs and experience leads you to leave your life to chance? How does that work for you? What benefits do you get from doing it? You may find taking some responsibility for the script works better for you. And please note I'm not saying you have to, what I would like for you is that you have made a conscious decision one way or the other (rather than just drifting).

**Are we in a scripted production, or an improvisation?** When I was young my lovely Mum supported me in doing a Theatre Arts course, one of the formative experiences in my teenage years. On that course we were often asked to do improvisation – we were given a few parameters and character definitions, then we had to make the production work as we went along. One of the most stretching theatrical things I ever did, but also a good metaphor for a world view that incorporates some form of higher direction, and free will. If we believe something else created us and our world, and maybe has a purpose for us, that doesn't have to mean our script is written – perhaps we are responsible for reacting within the parameters?

**How can you be the writer/director in your own production?** I have worked with people aged from 21 to over 70, and throughout one benefit of the work we do is that my clients feel they have more control over where they are heading (for some we have to find where they want to head first!). How much are you in control of your script? What can you do to create the outcomes you want?

### *Painless Business News*

Having passed the milestone of four years in this business, I reflected on the often quoted statistics that 4 out of 10 businesses fail in the first year, and only 1 in 5 survive five years. That did make me feel good, still being here after four, then I did some web research and found that there is little actual evidence this is true. As they say, 67.2% of statistics are made up or misquoted to prove an argument. One more reputable study did say one has a 37% chance of surviving four years.

But who needs global statistics to validate success? I am still here and haven't starved, though that may be largely due to marrying well. My point is I am delighted to be entering my fifth year, and I look forward to sharing the journey with many of you for years to come!

I have high hopes for this fifth year – I am just starting talks on a second book, a second business is coming out of gestation and showing signs of an interesting birth, and of course this business is still painless!

### *Book Review*

Absolutely no doubt what the book of the month should be in this issue. I have to thank Catherine for the recommendation (you can trust an English teacher to know her books) of *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini. The story is of a boy growing up in Afghanistan through the 70s, 80s and 90s, but the essence of the book runs so much deeper into how we relate with people of different backgrounds, inter-tribal conflict at all levels and the relationship between father and son.

An amazing book that I would urge any of you to read. Once you have finished the Business Development Handbook by James Butler and Michael Watson!

## *Painless Puns*

After last month's theme of JFDI, I must thank Tony who told me he had bought a book on procrastination, but kept putting off reading it, and Liz who found that for her the promise of a chocolate muffin and watching football on the TV was motivation to complete an important job!

If you choose to contemplate the script you have for yourself after reading this newsletter, consider this from an unknown writer:

*If you only look at what is, you might never attain what could be.*

And if you are waiting for your script to just deliver what you seek:

*If your ship doesn't come in, swim out to it.*      Jonathan Winters

Last night a good friend also quoted a saying, which I loved:

*I thought myself hard done by because I had no shoes, then I met a man with no feet.*

Having mentioned my science background, it reminds me of being in university and hearing philosophy students debate whether if a tree falls in wood where no-one is there to hear it, does it still make a sound. Here are two variations I'm not sure they covered:

*If someone could stand in a vacuum, would they hear a sound? – It depends if the hoover were switched on.*

*If a husband said something in a wood where no-one could hear him, would he still be wrong?*

## *Final Words*

If all of your world is a stage, what are you doing to direct the performance? In your business, are all aspects of your customer experience properly scripted and professionally produced?

And I can thoroughly recommend the benefits of undertaking some form of theatrical training at an early age. If you have children, do consider allowing them to try such a course, they are available widely. And if you are in the Thames Valley, please call my friend Donna Thomson, who runs an excellent theatrical school and agency (01865 340333).

Warmest regards

James Butler

email: [james@painlessbusiness.com](mailto:james@painlessbusiness.com)

voice: +44 1491 659073

web: <http://www.painlessbusiness.com>

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