

# James Butler's Newsletter #52

Amuse, Inform and Inspire

December 2006

After a couple of late issues in recent months, I am pleased to say we are now back to our more normal mid-month time slot. It touches me that some of you notice when I am delayed! I also love to hear feedback on each issue and thanks to Claire Thirlwall, who used her horticultural knowledge to develop my autumnal theme last month. Claire pointed out that losing leaves makes trees less vulnerable to high winds in winter. We can learn from this by considering how we can prepare for possible adverse conditions. What can you do to avoid being blown over in your business?

In the 18 years I have known my wife, she has inspired me many times. So it should be no surprise that when Bev mentioned that the poem "If" by Rudyard Kipling might make a good basis for a newsletter, I drew on that comment and made the poem the theme this month.

## *If you can keep your head*

Space does not allow me to quote the whole of this classic poem, but you can read it at <http://tinyurl.com/yv6qb>. The poem opens with:

*If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;*

Amongst the successful business owners and leaders I work with, this must be the most common quality I see. The ability to remain focussed on the goal when challenges arise creates consistency, momentum and security for customers and staff. Developing this ability is something any business person or leader can do – so that we can more coolly evaluate situations and determine the best course of action.

People who are volatile, reactive, impetuous and uncertain will often create confusion and discomfort amongst customers and staff. The outcome? Both customers and staff go elsewhere (because generally we prefer safety and security)?

Of course, to keep focussed on your overall goal, you need to know what it is, which could be where working with a coach (like me, perhaps?!) would be useful.

### **Do you keep your head when others are losing theirs?**

*If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,  
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,  
Or, being hated, don't give way to hating,*

In the last month I have had occasion to learn from this part of the poem. As we get involved in the "muck and bullets" of daily life, we can easily be lead by the actions of others. If someone else acts inappropriately, either against us or our business it can be very easy to get sucked into similar behaviours. If a competitor does something to poach our customers, we might retaliate and the actions can quickly escalate. A classic example might be a price war – in which no-one ultimately wins. On the face of it, the customer benefits, but as the suppliers trim their offering or cut corners because of the lower margins, the customer loses. Ever flown Ryannair?

The same applies to our personal conduct. We may have our own personal standards of behaviour, which others may not conform to. We can choose whether we "sink to their level" or remain true to ourselves and act in the way we believe is right. In my own experience, the possible short-term benefit from acting below our normal standard is quickly outweighed by our knowledge we have cheapened ourselves. (Now I sound like a school teacher talking about cheating in exams – "The only person you cheat is yourself!")

**Do you deal in lies, or have you given way to hating? Is that how you really want to be?**

*If you can dream*

Another part of Kipling's poem reads:

*If you can dream - and not make dreams your master;  
If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim;  
If you can meet with triumph and disaster  
And treat those two imposters just the same;*

In busy lives we can too often forget to think or dream, and I often work with clients who have had their head down, charging along, for so long they haven't realized they are charging in the wrong direction. We start off "in the groove" and without noticing the groove gets deeper and deeper. Suddenly, it's a rut!

Allowing ourselves to think and dream can ensure we have a better understanding of ourselves and what we want for our lives or businesses. This is why my full-day workshops on developing your business start with some navel gazing and thinking about our future. I know that most of the delegates on the course will not ordinarily make the time and energy available to do this. So I create the environment where they can.

So make time in your diary to regularly kick back and think about what you are doing, and why. Use your creative juices to develop plans for yourself and your business. But Kipling implies that too much of a good thing can be harmful. We want to dream, but not make dreams our master, we need to think, but not get lost in the process of thinking.

**Are you in the groove, or stuck in a rut? How can you make time to dream and think, without making it your master?**

*If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run -  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,  
And - which is more - you'll be a Man my son!*

Well, I couldn't let a running reference go by! Despite having run a lot less than I would have wished this year, I still enjoying the running metaphors. Here I think we can learn that, whether we are running, building our business or spending time with loved ones, we need to make the most of our time. An exhortation to stop procrastinating, stop doing peripheral activities and stop being sidetracked by unimportant but possibly more attractive ideas. As we work through the day we can stop and ask – has that last activity taken me towards my overall goal, or not? If not, do we want to waste time and energy like that again?

Of course, you would need to know what your overall goal is. I wonder who could help you determine that?

**Do you know what you want from 2007? Do you fill every minute with sixty seconds worth of distance run?**

## *Painless Business News*

I am writing this newsletter on my new laptop, supplied by Paul at Axis Business Solutions, and I can't tell you how great it is to have upgraded my IT. Clearing some of the IT issues I was tolerating and investing in some kit I can control (rather than the other way round) has taught me many lessons about false economising!

As this is the December issue, I would like to wish you a very merry Christmas. I don't send Christmas cards to clients or contacts, instead I have purchased a goat for the community I support in South Africa, through the charity World Vision. Luckily, this means they arrange the goat, because with modern security concerns it would be a devil to get one on a plane, I'm sure.

My first event of 2007 will be a Painless Business Workshop in Chalgrove on January 23<sup>rd</sup> at 9am. We will be considering how to get the right thing done at the right time (prioritising tasks and personal effectiveness). At just £20 for a 90 minute workshop, it is stunning value and it will help you keep your head while all around you are losing theirs. In case you're not sure, Chalgrove is in South Oxfordshire, between Oxford and High Wycombe – easily accessible from the M40.

## *Book Review*

As my birthday has passed since the last issue (still a long way to 40 though!), I can tell you about my present from Liz, one of the readers of this newsletter. She kindly bought me *The Naked Jape* by Jimmy Carr and Lucy Greeves. Part joke book and part essay on what makes us laugh, it was a really fun read. Liz either chose it for me because she knows I am interested in humour, or because she felt the Painless Puns need improving. Or maybe both.

## *Painless Puns*

Before sharing some of the material from *The Naked Jape*, some inspiring thoughts.

This could have been inspired by my last newsletter based on an autumn metaphor:

*If there were no tribulation, there would be no rest; if there were no winter, there would be no summer.* St. John Chrysostom

Except St John was the Patriarch of Constantinople in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. Who said my material was original or cutting edge?

On the subject of keeping your head:

*Always keep your composure. You can't score from the sin bin; and to win, you have to score.* Bobby Hull (American Hockey Player)

One for your Christmas Cracker:

*What do you call a depressed train? A low-comotive.*

And to follow the Kipling theme:

*If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs, you'll be taller than anybody else.* Tim Brooke-Taylor

## *Final Words*

As John Lennon once said, "Another year over". I hope 2006 has been a healthy, happy and prosperous year for you, and that this will continue into next year. If the last twelve months have been less than perfect, I hope your fortune changes in 2007.

Most of all, I hope you can keep your head when all around you are losing theirs. Now, I don't know whether I achieve that as much as I would like, but I am taller than most people so perhaps I do!

If you have a moment to reflect on your own good fortune during this festive period and would like to buy an alternative gift through World Vision, perhaps I could suggest some computer lessons for young people in the community I support. IT skills give the youngsters the chance of a job other than insecure, poorly-paid manual work. Just £17 buys 5 computer classes – visit <http://tinyurl.com/w2s6k>.

Merry Christmas!

Warmest regards

James Butler

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