

James Butler's Newsletter #50

Amuse, Inform and Inspire

October 2006

It is hard to believe we have now reached fifty issues. Thank you to all those who have been here since Issue 1, and welcome to those who have joined this month! The readership continues to grow and I thank all of you who forward this on each month.

The more observant of you will have noticed this issue is slightly late (in fact, only just qualifying as an October issue). This is just to prove we are all human, and sometimes even I get delayed and behind on my tasks! What is unusual is that I have known for over a month what the topic would be – still inspired by my trip to the Grand Canyon.

I've always wanted to...

Over the years I have been lucky enough to see and experience some amazing things – safari in Africa, tigers in the wild, the Taj Mahal and most recently the Grand Canyon. When I return from these trips and talk about what I have done, so often people will respond with “You’re so lucky, I’ve always wanted to do XYZ”. And the first question that pops into my head is, why haven’t you?

Before I start exploring that, I recognise that for some people certain dreams will always be dreams. However, over the years of working with people to achieve their goals, it is surprising how often the reality is that dreams are more achievable than people realise. In many, many cases the cliché that “where there is a will there is a way” can be very true. What I would love for every reader of this 50th issue, is that whatever they have always wanted to do could come true.

For my mother, she had always wanted to see the Grand Canyon. So when her 60th birthday approached, she talked about it and as a family we made it happen. Now she can enjoy her retirement with those memories – and she is already considering going back!

So, what is your ending to the start of the sentence “I’ve always wanted to”? Is there one thing, or a few? Do they relate to your business, to travel, experiences, childhood hobbies, or recently developed interests? What memories do you want to cherish in the future?

Once you have got your list (and that can be as short as one thing, or as long as you like – a long list may just take longer to achieve!), reflect on why these things have made it to your list. What is your motivation behind doing it? In this way we can start to feel which things on the list are most important to us. Typically, my clients will find some of their goals are not really theirs – they derive from family or societal pressure. In my own case, until very recently I had “Own a Jaguar car” on my list. After a lot of thinking, I realised that when I was a boy, I somehow associated Jaguar with high-flyers and to me it had always signified success. Yet, I am not a car person and would flinch every time I filled a Jaguar with petrol. What I realised is that I wanted to be able to afford a Jaguar – a sign of success – but I didn’t need to own one. So, is everything on your list really one of your goals, or is it coming from somewhere else? Does one goal stand out above the others and something you’ve always wanted to do?

Now you know clearly what you’ve always wanted to do, it may be a good idea to test your commitment. Generally, achieving this will involve some kind of differing priorities or some sacrifice compared to what you do now (otherwise you would have done it already!). Are you ready to make some sacrifices, or change your priorities to make this happen? At this stage we don’t yet know the scale of the commitment or the changes you will need to make, but it is good to be sure you’re ready for the challenge.

How can I, not can I?

The way our use of language in a question can affect how we respond is perhaps a subject for another newsletter, but with the goal you identified above in mind, consider the following two questions:

- Can you achieve that goal?
- How can you achieve that goal?

The first question is quite closed – at best we will get a “yes” in response, but no ideas on what that will involve. The second question immediately takes the mind into creating possibilities and options (and pre-supposes that you can). So, assuming that you can achieve your goal (because I am an eternal optimist), how can you achieve it? What’s involved?

For my mother, getting to the Grand Canyon involved obviously researching and planning the trip, saving the money, and finding someone to travel with as she was nervous about doing it with just her and her partner. Tempting Bev and I to join her was a cunning part of her plan!

Research what the steps would be involved in achieving your goal. If there is a sequence, start to order them so you only work on things as they come up. This month I heard a talk by Clint Evans, who won a rowing race across the Atlantic (yes, he rowed across the Atlantic!). I remember a comment he made – that 60% of getting to the finish was actually getting to the start. The planning and preparation can be vital.

We’re well on our way now – we know what you have always wanted to do, we know you’re committed to doing something to make it happen, and we now know what’s involved. So this is the easy bit. Something will be Step 1. How can you achieve Step 1?

Painless Business News

I’m delighted to say that a steady stream of new work is coming my way (thank you), and what is exciting is how that work varies so much. I have particularly enjoyed doing a few facilitated days with small teams, clarifying their strategy and how they will achieve it. Involving the whole team in the process creates far wider support, and increases the chances of everyone pulling together to achieve the objectives. If you or your team could benefit from an injection of momentum from a day like this, I would be delighted to discuss your options.

One small-business lesson I want to share with you this month comes from my own experience since getting back from the USA. When you create a plan, especially if it involves others, it can help to have a Plan B. On two occasions in the last month, my seemingly best-laid plans have fallen apart because suppliers have had to withdraw, through no fault of their own. Which leads to a second lesson – networking isn’t just about selling, it’s about finding names and numbers of people who can help you out of a hole in a hurry!

Book Review

This month I have enjoyed *Desert Solitaire* by Edward Abbey. First published before I was born, it is a personal account of being a park ranger in Utah, just as the commercialisation of the National Parks, and mass tourism, took off in the USA. In many ways it is a eulogy to the once pristine wilderness, from an author who also created the Monkey Wrench Gang.

With such a deep personal interest in wild places and wild animals, I found the book very absorbing. It did illuminate how easy it can be to create our own moral inconsistency – how we will visit these places of wilderness, and then complain about all the people there. A bit like believing everyone should use the bus – so I can get to work quicker in my car.

I am sure I can rely on you the reader to tell me if I ever demonstrate such inconsistency in this newsletter!

Painless Puns

The comment from Clint Evans stuck with me so much, I am happy to repeat it here:

In rowing across the Atlantic, 60% of the effort in getting to the finish line was involved in getting to the start line.

I am not sure whether this quote only applies to men, or if women are equally susceptible, but I liked the sentiment:

Few things are needed to make a wise man happy; nothing can make a fool content; that is why most men are miserable. Francois De La Rochefoucauld

For those of you who have met my pet, you will know why this is appropriate, but it can also be a lesson for those of us who seem to be constantly searching:

It is difficult to catch a black cat in a dark room – especially if the cat isn't there.
Chinese Proverb

I liked this useful tip from the comedian Milton Jones:

"If you're being chased by a police dog, try not to go through a tunnel, then on to a little seesaw, then jump through a hoop of fire. They're trained for that."

You all know how I like marriage jokes? A couple I know got divorced recently over religious differences. He thought he was God and she didn't.

Final Words

When we all grow old gracefully together, I hope we can meet up in a nursing home (it'll be a big one to fit all the readers in) and you will say to me "I am so glad I did XYZ". That has got to be better than "I always wanted to do XYZ".

And what is XYZ anyway?

Warmest regards

James Butler

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