

James Butler's Newsletter #54

Amuse, Inform and Inspire

February 2007

A little bit late with the newsletter this month (see Painless Business News for why), but that means the many new subscribers in the last ten days will get one extra issue to read! Welcome to all those who have subscribed this month, and thanks to existing readers who have passed on an issue, or recommended me.

I am delighted that so many of you liked the Karl Marx pun last month (especially Joan), and the response each month to my humour set me thinking about the use of humour within business – do we use it enough, can we use it too much? Read on for my thoughts.

Laughter is the best medicine

I have always enjoyed a good joke and delight in seeing people laugh at what I do (except on first dates, but that's a whole other story). Laughter helps us relax, releases the right sorts of hormones and oils the wheels of interaction with others. As children we are said to laugh 300-400 times a day (those kids obviously had a more entertaining teacher than I did), yet as adults we laugh less than 15 times a day. Isn't that a shame?

When developing relationships with others, humour and laughter are excellent ways to build rapport. In business, this can be important every day, whether we are trying to connect with a client, a supplier or a colleague, sharing some humour can be an excellent way of cementing the relationship. Sometimes that can mean smiling at their un-funny joke, but more often it is about a connection that says you have something in common. That has to be good for the relationship.

Most of us will be at work for almost half of our waking hours, so surely it is OK to laugh and enjoy ourselves at work. Undertakers may need to choose their moments carefully, but the rest of us surely can inject a little fun into our work? In my experience, people who are having fun work better and harder.

When we meet new people and share a joke or a smile, it makes us more memorable, and they will associate us, or our company, with that warm positive feeling we get when we laugh. That has to be a good thing! So next time you are meeting new people at a networking or training event, lighten up, smile and look for some opportunities for laughter. It will help people remember you positively. (This is not the only reason I show Fawley Towers clips, or play Abba songs, in my training days, but it is one of them!).

Finally, in many cases laughter definitely is the best medicine. It is not the best prescription for broken limbs, but certainly for dealing with workplace stress, the most common cause of work-related illness, it is one of the best tonics. So if you're stressed because you are busy, or stressed because you're too quiet, finding the opportunity to have a chuckle every now and then could be the best medication.

Laugh and the world laughs with you

Solitary laughter can be a good thing – using some of the resources mentioned later to raise a smile at your desk is a good start to lightening up. But laughter is best shared – and has the benefits I mentioned about rapport building and helping people remember you. We just need to make sure we are remembered for the right reasons.

We must not forget that whilst humour can be useful in our job, for most of us it is not our job. So the business still has to get done, and be taken seriously. We need to consider

when humour is appropriate, and when it isn't. Like telling a joke, it is all in the timing. If you are handling a customer complaint, that may not be the best time to tell the one about the bishop, the car mechanic and Britney Spears stuck in a lift. As I have seen recently, cracking jokes in email is a highly hazardous activity (luckily it wasn't me who had written the email). Most emails are written at speed and read at leisure – people will often read a different meaning into what is written.

Similarly, the type of humour we use needs to be considered. Of course, humour that is discriminatory or demeaning should be avoided. Although I do have permission from both my wife and my mother-in-law to crack jokes at their expense in these pages! And to be honest, there is so much other good material, why is it needed? Some of you may recall that once in the many years of this newsletter I have had a complaint about my humour. I apologized privately immediately, and in the next issue, and have tried to be more sensitive ever since. Importantly, I didn't see any offence in the joke, but one of my network did (and it is how it is received which is more important).

So we need to consider how our communications and humour may be received. It can take years to build a reputation or brand and a moment to destroy it, so always use discretion in your humour.

We can also have too much of a good thing. Email has spawned an evil monster – the forwarded "humorous" messages which clog our Inboxes. Similarly our business conversations or presentations are not gagfests. Keeping the quantity of jokes appropriate is another important skill to develop. I don't advocate the constant forwarding of jokes – and thankfully my Inbox stays fairly free of them. I do, however, invite them from people I know and respect. Nigel Day, for example, brightens my day at least twice a week with simple, quick to read, fun messages. And it keeps him in my mind now he has moved to deepest Devon. So much so, I can recommend him now to anyone who wants help with their websites – www.clarison.co.uk). Nigel's humour is an important part of my medicine!

What is your laughter prescription?

There are many ways to lighten your day, here are just a few ideas to keep our spirits up:

- Watch the first six minutes of the Scotland vs Italy rugby match from this Saturday. The most hilarious display of defending seen on a sports field. (And I enjoyed sharing the moment with you, Graeme!).
- Receive a daily joke or cartoon. Personally, I receive a Daily Dilbert (www.dilbert.com) which makes me smile, and gives me opportunities to keep in touch with contacts with a "saw this and thought of you" email.
- Watch funny movies (not in work time, of course). Allow yourself to be entertained. Last week I watched Ferris Bueller's day off (an eighties classic) and loved the line "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it."
- Access quality jokes (such as those used in this esteemed publication!). Use Google to find a daily joke site, or give yourself permission for five minutes surfing now and then to freshen up the mind. Note that was five, not fifty minutes.
- A good contact of mine, Hilary Farmer (simply the best in using therapy to deal with fears, anxieties and other things that hold you back) recently popped on my TV at home, extolling the virtues of a laughter workshop. It looked great fun and Hilary now raves about it (www.thelaughterschool.com).
- I couldn't finish a newsletter on laughter without mentioning Anne McDonald. She is a certified Laughologist and great at bringing fun to individuals and organisations. Shame about her love for the Osmonds (www.mcdonaldcoaching.com).

Painless Business News

What a busy month! Lots of new clients, several training opportunities and best of all some great referrals from clients and contacts (thank you!). Referred prospects are definitely the best and I am forever grateful for the support you give in growing my business (which I do try to repay with referrals back!).

My radio interview on the BBC went well – enough for them to ask me back last week, and to book another in March. That was great fun to do, and whilst my sister is the only confirmed listener to the first interview, the second was a phone in, so I know one other person was listening. But I am now “as featured on the BBC” and thanks to Dick Denney for the initial referral. Due to BBC technical difficulties, I have yet to get either appearance for use on the website. When I do, I’ll let you know.

The Painless empire is growing steadily, and working with my marketing guru Christine I have developed some plans for more growth in 2007. Now I have associates to keep busy, there is a lot to be done! Watch this space for more announcements on partnerships, new business ideas, more training opportunities and information on my fantastic associates!

Book Review

Some of you may recall I undertook running a marathon for charity about 18 months ago. It is a source of great pride, but has also created an unfortunate impression in the mind of some friends. A couple are training for marathons this spring and say things like “you’re a marathon runner, why not join us?” Let us just be clear, there is a big difference between being a marathon runner and having run a marathon!

But my interest in the subject did mean I enjoyed *The Looniness of the Long Distance Runner* (a pun in the title was enough for me). Anyone contemplating a charity sporting endeavour would probably enjoy it. It is available on Amazon, though my copy came from our great mobile library here in Cholsey!

Another library gem was *B****cks to Alton Towers*, also available on Amazon, but placing this newsletter at risk from spam filters. The book is nowhere as rude as its title and is a lovely travelogue of quintessentially British tourist destinations. Made me want to go to some!

Painless Puns

On the theme of laughter, some inspiring thoughts:

He who laughs, lasts. Anon

Laugh and the world laughs with you; weep and you weep alone. Ella Wheeler Wilcox (who obviously never supported Scottish rugby, or she would have wept with 60,000 others several times a year).

And if humour fails you, remember to just be pleasant:

One kind word can warm three winter months. Japanese proverb

Another reason for this being a busy month was the mountain of Valentine’s cards I had to open two weeks ago. Having film-star looks is a real cross to bear at this time of year. Actually, the only card I received was from my dear wife, and because she knows I love her, I can get away with the following:

I had some words with my wife, and she had a few paragraphs with me. Anonymous

When a man steals your wife, there is no better revenge than to let him keep her.
Sacha Guitry

And a funny picture I saw this week that I really liked (and a great marketing idea) can be found at <http://www.painlessbusiness.com/images/jigsaw.jpg>.

Final Words

I hope this newsletter has brought a smile to your day, and I hope you can find ways to bring more humour into your work in the coming days and months. As always with what I try to write here, it only has value if you make changes as a result. So what will you do to get your daily average laughter count above 15 and nearer 300?

Have a superb month and build great businesses.

Warmest regards

James Butler

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Careful assessment of your needs ensures that the most appropriate intervention is supplied – whether one to one ongoing coaching, strategic reviews, training events or facilitated group exercises within a team.

To discuss how you can painlessly build the business you want, call James today for a no-obligation discussion of your situation.