

James Butler's Newsletter #53

Amuse, Inform and Inspire

January 2007

This time of year presents a challenge to avoid clichéd topics on fresh starts, resolutions and annual plans but I hope I will resist in this issue. However, there is, I believe, an air of freshness and new beginning at the moment, now we have turned the corner in the northern hemisphere and the daylight is getting longer. Of course, that could be because global warming has brought Spring into January!

As I searched for a theme for this newsletter, two clients raised the same topic on the same day, and I knew I had to follow that sign! We were discussing how to develop their plans for 2007, and it was apparent that what they needed to do was talk more.

It's Good To Talk

There are many reasons why it can be good to talk – the main one being that it is how I earn my living, so you would expect me to encourage it, wouldn't you? Where can you gain from talking this month?

Talk about your plans:- whether it is a cliché or not, January is a time when people are interested in our plans for the year. Talking about what we want to do in 2007 can help us gain clarity on what we actually want (there is nothing better for focussing the mind than explaining our thoughts to someone else). We can also gain feedback on those plans – depending on who we talk to – but we may gain new insights and fresh approaches by talking things through with others.

Talk about your business:- in my experience, people are interested in what others do for a living – so talking about your business can help increase the number of people who know what you do, why you do it, and what you want to do more of. Even when I ran a very specialised business for Biffa, I did find connections which helped the business in unusual places. You never know who other people know! So by talking about your business you can generate interest in what you do, create people who could refer to you, and who knows you might meet a future customer!

Talk about your challenges:- we may not want to pour out all our troubles onto total strangers (though that can be cathartic at times!), but discussing the challenges we face can help us in many ways. Sometimes it is good to just vent, and let go of the frustrations we face (not always fun to be on the receiving end, admittedly). Sometimes we can gain perspective, especially if the person is not closely involved – this can help us see new aspects of an old challenge. We can also find sources of help when we are open about the challenges we face – who said we had to solve everything on our own?

Talk about them:- in this newsletter we are focussing on benefits to you, but we should remember talking is best when it is a two-way process. As you talk through the things outlined above, be curious about the same issues for the person you are talking to. That engages them more and could create whole new opportunities for you to support them, connect them with someone else, or just to listen.

The Who and The How

You could just randomly find people to talk to – bus queues, the guy next to you in the cinema, the old man at the bar in the pub, or the telesales girl who calls you from Bombay to sell you a new loan. However, your talking might be more productive, for both parties, if you consider who best to talk to.

Friends/family:- we all know parents like to hear from us – why not start there?! And how many Christmas cards did you send with “we must catch up in the New Year”? Now is your chance to get in touch and have a good chat.

Staff/associates:- if you are developing plans for your business, sharing your thoughts and discussions with those who work within it in seems an obvious place to start (and you could include suppliers in this). Of course, your choice of topic must be carefully selected – you don’t want to unsettle anyone with talk of selling up and emigrating to Croatia for example.

Clients:- in my experience customers like to know what is happening in your business – they like to know you are moving forward. Perhaps you can tell them how they could be better clients, or ask them how you can be a better supplier, or ask them for referrals.

Your network:- remind people you exist. Share your plans, and enquire about theirs. Keep yourself up to date on your industry, and be open to hearing about new solutions or new opportunities.

Your advisers:- who do you go to for advice or to bounce ideas off? Use that resource – running your own business (as most of my readers do) doesn’t mean you have to be on your own in business. If you have a ‘proper job’, who could advise you on making the most of your current role, or preparing for the next one?

New people:- spreading our wings and talking with new people can increase our network and inject fresh thoughts and ideas. It can also be fascinating to share thoughts with people who are new to what we do – some of the naive questions they ask can be the most powerful!

Whoever we talk to, it can help to remember some ground rules on how we might want to talk to people:

Be positive:- I don’t mean deny any challenges you are facing, but by talking about them without moaning you are more likely to open your mind, and more likely to generate a helpful response from who you are talking to. It’s the difference between telling people the world is a mess and talking about how it could be better.

Be honest:- If you’re looking for more clients, don’t be shy about saying so. Just don’t beg. Being genuine about your hopes, and the obstacles stopping you achieving them, gives you more opportunity of finding ways to achieve what you want.

Be discreet:- I would always advocate avoiding talking about others (ie gossiping), but it can also be wise to be discreet about our own plans. As I mentioned, talking too soon about making all your staff redundant can be ill-advised, or being too open about your pending court case for baring your behind in front of the mayor at your New Year’s party can reduce your chance of generating new business. Or maybe not!

Be open to listening:- through talking to others you create all sorts of opportunities to learn from them, gain referrals from them, or connect more closely with them. But if you are prattling away you might miss that opportunity. Be open to hear what others have to say.

In case you were unsure, this newsletter has not been sponsored by a leading British telephone company, but I have borrowed their old advertising slogan. In general, it IS good to talk and using the early part of the year to connect with others and create renewed energy about what you are trying to achieve could propel you further than you realise.

Painless Business News

If you want to hear me talk, you have the opportunity this month to hear my debut on BBC radio. At about 2pm on Friday 19th January I shall be answering questions about running a business on BBC Radio Berkshire. If you read this after the event, or live outside the area, you can listen again at http://www.bbc.co.uk/berkshire/local_radio. If this goes well, I may be doing it again – so watch this space!

A last minute call for my first event of 2007 - a Painless Business Workshop in Chalgrove on January 23rd 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 we have some spaces left.

Fans of the comedian Peter Kay may recall he did a tour a year or so ago entitled *The 'Mum Needs a New Bungalow' Tour*. Well, my Mum has a lovely bungalow, but as I am constantly seeking referrals to grow Painless Business, would it help you to think anytime you pass my name on you are contributing to the *'James Wants a New TV' Offer?* If you enjoy this newsletter, or think someone you know could benefit from support in growing or improving their business, please encourage them to get in touch. And I'll let you come and watch the new TV!

Book Review

Another holiday to South Africa (perhaps that offer should be *'The wife wants another safari?'*), and some great poolside reading. Well, it was poolside when it wasn't raining!

The pick of the books would be *A Piano in the Pyrenees* by Tony Hawks. A similar style to his travels in Ireland and Moldova, it was very entertaining. And of more interest to Bev and I because her father has bought and renovated two properties in France – we could see the parallels!

Painless Puns

I shall draw again on *The Naked Jape* for some puns, but first some thoughts I found inspiring:

Do every act of your life as if it were your last. Marcus Aurelius (the Roman emperor)

Things turn out best for the people who make the best of the way things turn out. John Wooden

And for those who want validation that partying all night on New Year's Eve is OK (which may include me, having retired finally at 7am):

Be good and you'll be lonesome. Mark Twain

Two philosophers are sat talking in a nudist camp. One says "I assume you've read Marx?" The other replies "Yes, I think it's these wicker chairs."

And having mentioned Peter Kay earlier, here's one of his jokes. How does Bob Marley like his doughnuts? Wi' jam in.

Not sure if that paid for the bungalow, but I liked it.

Final Words

Thanks as always to those clients who every week give me inspiration for things to share with my newsletter readers. As I approach five years doing this, I still enjoy learning from the way clients work through their plans and challenges. I am grateful that they find it good to talk to me.

But that TV won't buy itself, so I'm off now to talk to people about my own plans. I hope you will continue to enjoy sharing the journey with me. Who will you talk to about your plans?

Warmest regards

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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.