

# James Butler's Newsletter #58

Amuse, Inform and Inspire

June 2007

When working with clients, I often discuss how they will celebrate their success when it arrives and it is something I have turned my own thoughts to as I approach my fifth anniversary of working for myself. Whilst I have yet to decide how I will celebrate, I did start to reminisce about those heady days in 2002. Some of you have read every newsletter since, and have helped with referrals of clients or newsletter subscribers over that time – thank you for the support.

As it happens, my first newsletter included a topic that I feel is relevant this month, so I am going to reprise the subject this month. It is a perfect exercise as we enter the summer months (apologies to those in the Southern Hemisphere) and I hope it benefits some of you.

## *What are you tolerating?*

As I write this, our family car is undergoing its 100,000 mile service. At this point, the service is about replacing key components (apparently cam belts are very important at this age!) and keeping the engine running smoothly. After that kind of distance, sludge builds up in the engine, decreasing performance and risking a blow-out. How true that can be for us in life too!

Many of us (especially me) accumulate “sludge” as we go through life – physical and emotional clutter that slows us down and creates a risk of melt down. When I first trained as a coach, I undertook the exercise of “Clearing Tolerations” and found it helped enormously to zap that sludge and increase my effectiveness. I try to repeat the exercise regularly – whether it be in my business or at home – and I still notice when I haven’t done it for a while.

The theory is that we all have things that we tolerate in life, that we would prefer were resolved. These can be emotional things like “I tolerate when people don’t respect my time and are late” or physical things like “I tolerate the dripping tap in the kitchen”. Whilst we can survive with these tolerations in the background, we expend mental and emotional energy working round them. If we clear them up we find we don’t have that energy drain anymore, and the process of clearing them is often energising in itself.

Sometimes the toleration requires a change in someone else, but in all cases we have to take responsibility for our own environment and take the action to make the change. This may be hiring someone to clear our ironing, booking the car in to get the dent mended, or talking to a colleague about their behaviour and the effect it has on us.

Once we have a list of these things we are tolerating, it becomes easy to work down the list and cross items off – in itself a motivational tool. You can decide which things to tick off – a mix of big tasks and quick wins is often the most motivating mix. Fifteen minutes a day working on the list can have a huge impact. Since returning from my most recent trip to Budapest, I have been trying to clear some of my own tolerations, and it has helped me be more productive. I am almost at the stage of being able to see my desk without piles of papers waiting for action!

Another thing to look for is so-called Pivotal Tolerations – one thing that actually creates five other things on the list. If you address the Pivotal one, the rest may resolve themselves, and won’t return. For example, if you are tolerating not earning enough, resolving that may provide a solution (in the form of funds) for others that need an investment to clear them.

## *Making the List*

When you are ready to make the list, I would suggest you look in a few different areas, to ensure that you have a balanced approach to resolving them (dealing with small issues at home won't help if there is a big issue at work, for example). I would also recommend deciding what resources you have to help clear the tolerations – maybe set aside a sum of money, definitely some time, maybe the help of friends/relatives/staff.

Where might you look for Tolerations then? An easy place to start is your physical environment. Physically or mentally walk around your home and your workplace, room by room. Look round and list all the things that you tolerate about the environment, for example:

- Piles of paper on my desk
- Peeling paper in the corner of the room
- The stain on the ceiling where we had a water leak
- The chair with a hole in the furnishings
- The doorbell that needs new batteries
- The outside-light bulb that needs changing
- A vital piece of work equipment that doesn't function as I need it to
- My PC crashes whenever I am in the middle of something important

You get the idea. I would suggest a list for your home and a list for your workplace. Don't worry how long the list is – the important thing is to get them written down. You will soon be ticking things off!

The second place to look for Tolerations will be your relationships with others. Again, this could be at home or in the workplace, but there are generally things we find frustrating or energy-draining in our interactions with other people (if only everyone were like me, then the world would be perfect, right?).

A word of caution, however. It can be very tempting to list everything that annoys you about other people and in itself this can be cathartic and useful. But you will make little progress if everything is about changes in other people – because you have some influence but little direct control over how other people behave. As you list your tolerations in this area, consider whether you have described a problem with someone else, and see if you can re-phrase it so the change is within your responsibility. For example "My wife doesn't listen to me" could be changed to "I need to improve my communication with my wife".

Other examples from this area might be:

- I allow my friends to constantly drain me with their gossiping
- I haven't connected with my community
- I allow my boss to bully me into unachievable deadlines
- I don't motivate my receptionist enough to do all I need her to do
- I have a pile of customer contacts I haven't responded to
- I avoid difficult conversations with my mother/spouse/boss/staff/pet cat/all of the above

Once you have your two lists, choose 5 things you are going to clear in the next week (remember to look for Pivotal Tolerations) and Just Flippin' Do It. Clear them and see how it affects your personal energy. Then work on the next 5, then the next and so on.

I am confident that clearing the tolerations will help you work more effectively, clear your brain for considering more strategic issues and will give you far, far more energy. If you want some help working through this process, I have associates standing by who would be delighted to coach you into drawing up a list and zapping those tolerations!

## *Painless Business News*

In the last month I have had another business trip to Budapest and a glorious few days at a conference in Helsinki – I can truly recommend the latter as a holiday destination (in the summer – it was only dark for about an hour a night). I am grateful to my assistant Carol and my associates Ann and Hugh for helping keep the show on the road while I am overseas. I have learnt the value of a strong team!

If you have found the tolerations exercise of interest, I can recommend the next workshop I'm holding at Woodside, near Oxford. At 5pm on 11 July we will be considering **Overturing the Summer Slump** – a session on setting clear goals for July and August to clear clutter, finish jobs or increase sales (you decide!). Don't get the Summertime Blues, make the most of the holiday season. We have a couple of places left, so email me if you would like to attend (the cost is just £20).

Thanks to those who attended the last workshop, on business ethics. We raised a total of £150 for the project I support in South Africa. As a result of some monumental effort by Hilary Handley of [Wildfire](#), the project now has it's own [website](#) where you can see what we have been up to.

## *Book Review*

A couple of non-business books this month. In Helsinki I enjoyed re-reading *Good Vibrations* by Tom Cunliffe, not a sordid reference work, or a bio of the Beach Boys, but a travelogue of a couple riding Harley Davidsons from coast to coast in the USA (and back again). A great insight into small town America and gave me some more ideas for my retirement trip in an RV!

I have also read *The Wrong Boy* by Willy Russell, a novel written from the standpoint of a child. Apart from some in-depth references to Morrissey (not my favourite artist), it contains some though-provoking plot twists, making you realise that being innocent doesn't stop you being guilty in the eyes of the world.

## *Painless Puns*

Some quotes I found this month, the first is perfect when considering tolerations:

*Realize that if you have time to whine and complain about something then you have the time to do something about it.*  
Anthony J. D'Angelo

*Don't be afraid to take a big step if one is indicated. You can't cross a chasm in two small jumps.*  
David Lloyd George

*Better the cottage where one is merry than the palace where one weeps.*  
Chinese Proverb

Apparently my puns plunged new depths last month. I am glad they get your attention.

Some of you may know I have long since said good bye to my fringe and my receding hairline is now almost on it's way back round again. I went to the barber last week and asked how much for cutting my limited hair. "£20" he replied. I couldn't believe it and asked him to justify the price. "To be honest" he said "The hair cut is £5, but the rest is to hire the search party".

Ever noticed how the word "politics" describes the process so well: "poli" in Latin meaning "many" and "tics" meaning "bloodsucking creatures."

## *Final Words*

Clearing tolerations is a great way to refresh your energy at home or at work, and can be especially useful in fighting lethargy during the warm summer months. I shall be continuing my own process of zapping a few energy drainers (so the mother-in-law better watch out when I see her next week!) and I would be interested to hear how it works for any of you.

As always, thank you for reading this far, and if you can think of a friend or colleague who might enjoy my thoughts, please forward this to them. In the coming months I plan to start a blog on my website, which may change the nature of this newsletter – rest assured I will keep you posted!

Warmest regards

James Butler

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