

# James Butler's Newsletter #55

Amuse, Inform and Inspire

March 2007

This month, the topic I wanted to write about was very clear to me – how to seek referrals or ask for business. It is something so many people I work with find difficult, and I am lucky that I have worked through that particular challenge myself. With the topic clear, all I needed was a memorable 'hook' to hang it on.

A little time on Google later, and the very memorable Kajagoogoo hit "Too Shy" was an obvious choice (according to VH-1 viewers, the 27<sup>th</sup> Greatest Song of the 1980s). Of course, I was still in short trousers when it was a hit back in '83, but the chorus is one of those lovely/annoying pop songs that just sticks in your mind. I'm hoping that my thoughts on asking for business will stick in your mind in the same way.

## *Too Shy, Shy*

Many of us in business, whatever our field, can be reticent about asking others for business. This is especially true if we are the product, or it is our own business. And it is especially true in the UK, where that British quality of being reserved can act against our interests. Do any of the following sound like something you would say?

- "I don't like selling – it feels too pushy"
- "I hate talking about myself – it would be so much easier if I was pushing a product, not myself."
- "I enjoy doing what I do, so it feels wrong to charge for it."
- "I get uncomfortable when I start talking about money. I get tongue-tied."
- "People will just think I'm desperate for money and will be put off."
- "Asking for referrals is just too far outside my comfort zone."

I think I've heard all of those in recent months! And there is nothing wrong with feeling that way, it just may not help you when you want to grow your business. If you live in the UK, we experience huge cultural conditioning that one should always be too shy, shy. We are encouraged to be humble, modest, hide our light under a bushel, be reserved, to not be too in-your-face.

Yet we allow the pendulum to swing too far the other way and paralyse ourselves with fear when it comes to asking for payment, asking for referrals or asking for a piece of work. How great would it be if we could get over that and just feel more comfortable? How much easier would it be to grow our businesses if we could ask those customers who already use us for their help?

This is something I always try to model in this newsletter, in my training events and when I talk with people. My business definitely grows by referral – I regularly get new leads from people who read this newsletter, are old friends or former clients. In most issues of this newsletter I will overtly or implicitly invite people to forward this newsletter, or share my name with someone else. And it works (thank you!).

So, what I want for you, the reader, this month is for you to improve your skills and comfort level in asking for referrals/payment/new business (or all three!). I know some of you reading this are far more comfortable with this, so I challenge you to raise your game as well (we can all do better). If a business application is not applicable to you, consider how you can ask for more, more comfortably. Could it be asking for more love from your spouse, more time out with your friends, asking out the guy in the pub you have fancied for 18 months (please do not try this if you are already married!)?

## *Hush, hush, eye to eye*

We know what we want, how can we work towards it? When I gave a workshop on this topic at a conference last autumn, we discussed where our fears came from, how to challenge those fears, and we practiced asking for referrals in a safe environment. I propose to follow the same path here:

**Hush, Hush:-** First, take some time out to quieten the mind and focus on this issue – don't try to tackle it whilst doing 14 other things. Just 15 minutes now, and a few minutes a day for a week or three, and I think you will have this licked. Can you commit to create that hush in the next few weeks?

**Change Your Mind:-** I don't mean decide not to carry on, I mean change the way your mind works when this issue comes up. For many, our mind falls into a well-trodden groove which leads direct to Panic, Fear, Discomfort and Embarrassment. You can convince yourself that this issue can lead to Calm, Strength, Ease and Confidence – you just need to rediscover that path in your mind. (If you would like help with this, give me a call – it is something I, or an associate, can help with).

**Share Your Gift:-** the product or service you provide benefits people. You have happy customers who like what you do. It is quite likely that you are good at what you do – you may have a gift for it. So surely it is the right thing to do to share this with more people? The world will be a better place if more people are made happier by using your product or service. Isn't it your responsibility to tell as many people as possible?

**Let Go of the Money:-** If you can buy into sharing your gift, you can see that asking for business is not about asking for money. Sure, you will get paid, because you bring value to others and our society recognises that most often through exchange of money (and you can't pay the mortgage with happy customers, you need hard currency!). But by asking for referrals or for business, you are saying "Help me share what I do with more people", NOT "Help me feed my kids".

**Ask the wall:-** this is what we did at the Conference in November. If your greatest fear is being dead-panned by the person you ask, ask a wall. You can't get a colder, less responsive audience (except for my wife when I suggested we let Sandra Bullock move in for a few weeks). And when you ask the wall, you'll feel silly and probably laugh (especially if you do it in company, as about 30 osteopaths did last November!) So when you come to ask a proper person, you'll remember that laughter, and you'll relax (and we are on the new path to Calm, Strength, Ease and Confidence).

**Ask a friend or colleague:-** we have survived asking some inanimate brick and plaster, now let's practise on a safe audience. Try asking for referrals or new business with someone you trust. Rehearse the wording, do it a few times until it is natural (or until your friend starts giggling and you can't concentrate).

**Eye to Eye:-** once you've practised on the wall, look someone (a real person, not a friend, this time!) in the eye, and just ask. Learn by doing. If you ask from a place of calm and honesty, making it not about the money and looking to just do more of what you do, I guarantee you won't get rudely knocked back. In fact, if you get knocked back, call me and we will talk through it. If you followed the steps above and it still happened, I'll donate £50 to the charity project I am involved with in South Africa. As much as I want to raise funds for them, I'm sure my money is safe!

## *Painless Business News*

Again, thank you to all those who have passed my name to others this month – I really appreciate it when I get an email or phone call from someone who is already “warmed-up” by your comments to them. Some very interesting opportunities have come up this month, from people who read this newsletter, so thanks.

On 10 April I shall be speaking again at the Tuesday Business Club near Wallingford, Oxfordshire. I shall be covering **What Business Can Learn from ER**. Drawing on the popular US TV drama, we will explore five key lessons a successful ER or Casualty department can teach us. Most small businesses may not be saving lives several times a day, but we can still learn from what we see in these high-paced dramas.

Expect a fun, interactive session with some TV clips to inspire us and plenty of discussion. We will look at specific actions, not just general theory and you are guaranteed to leave with some things to change in your own business. Exploding buildings, gunfights and dramatic life-saving interventions will not be included (but a film-star look-alike might be). Visit [www.tuesdaybusinessclub.co.uk](http://www.tuesdaybusinessclub.co.uk) for details.

Before that, on 4 April, I will be hosting a meeting of the Late Breakfast in Abingdon. The guest speaker will be Clint Evans, who won a rowing race across the Atlantic and now talks of his exploits and how they apply to businesses. Clint has had a mention in these pages before, and he is a superb speaker, so if you can be in Abingdon next Wednesday from 9am, please visit [www.thelatebreakfast.co.uk](http://www.thelatebreakfast.co.uk) and let Christine know you are coming.

## *Book Review*

Two great books this month! The first is *Animals, Inc.* by Kenneth Tucker and Vandana Allman. This was a serendipitous find in Waterstones one day (in the sale!), and is a business version of the parable in Orwell’s *Animal Farm*. If you work (or have ever worked) in a large company, and have your fair share of crazy ideas filtering down from management, you’ll love it. If you have your own business, it makes one think about how one can read too much into running the business and forget to actually run the business. This newsletter remains, of course, a must-read however!

The second book is one I am only half way through, but want to share with you. It is the snappily-titled *Five Loaves, Two Fishes and Six Chicken Nuggets* by Barry Gibbons. Barry used to run Grand Met, and so was responsible for Burger King on a global basis. So he knows a lot about the fast-food industry. Broken into 59 short chapters (based on a magazine column he used to write), it contains some excellent thought provoking material on customer service, running a business and the good or evil of businesses like Burger King. He is an intelligent fellow and he has a great sense of humour. No wonder I like him, we have so much in common!

## *Painless Puns*

I found two great quotes relating to our topic this month:

*The way you overcome shyness is to become so wrapped up in something that you forget to be afraid.*  
Lady Bird Johnson (widow of Lyndon B Johnson)

And then a slightly longer quote from Marianne Williamson:

*Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.  
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.  
It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.  
We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?*

*Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God.  
Your playing small doesn't serve the world.  
There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.  
We are all meant to shine, as children do.  
We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.  
It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.  
And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.  
As we're liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.*

Thanks Lerae for first sharing that with me. And no, Nelson Mandela never used it in his Inauguration speech.

On a more flippant note:

*I went to a seafood disco the other night. I managed to pull a mussel.*

If you still have concerns over money, think of Spike Milligan's words:

*Money can't buy you happiness, but it does bring you a more pleasant form of misery.*

### *Final Words*

If we could let go of our discomfort and shyness when it comes to growing our business, we could share our gifts with more people. Unless you retail landmines, that should make the world a better place. So remember, your playing small doesn't serve the world.

For those who have been wondering since the second paragraph what VH-1's Greatest Song of the 1980s was, it was Livin' on a Prayer by Bon Jovi. I feel another newsletter coming on. "We're half way the-re, wo-ah, we're livin' on a pray-er". Have a great month.

Warmest regards

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