

James Butler's Newsletter #57

Amuse, Inform and Inspire

May 2007

When I put pen to paper for this newsletter each month (or, technically, finger to keyboard), it is always a mystery how people will react to my thoughts. Over the dozens of issues (thanks to those who have been here for the whole five years!) I have learnt that whatever I write, some will like it, some won't and some won't be bothered. But last month's issue on Ubuntu certainly seems to have touched more of a chord with readers. I am glad it was enjoyed – and I will be even happier if it motivates you to act more in accordance with the principles!

While you were receiving that newsletter, I was relaxing in South Africa, having led a group of 14 amazing people on a visit to the charity project Bev and I support. I saw many things on that trip which changed how I view things in life, but one of the greatest lessons was the power of just simply connecting with people.

Ostensibly we had travelled out to teach in local schools, renovate a derelict building to create an orphan drop-in centre and to visit projects we have either funded, or would be asked to fund. Actually, what the community seemed to value most was that we had wanted to connect with them, wanted to learn from them and wanted to spend time with them. As I thought through their reaction, I knew exactly what to write in this newsletter!

People Grow by Connection

The organisation that trained me in coaching, Coach U, have a set of nine Guiding Principles which they feel summarises human interaction. One of these is *People Grow by Connection*. This is a principle that has stuck with me for years, and really became apparent as I watched what happened in South Africa. I saw the 16 of us from the UK growing in each other's company as we travelled together – quieter ones blossoming, people supporting each other etc. And then I saw the obvious growth in both groups when we met our hosts within the project.

Language was difficult, but communication seemed easy, as we exchanged handshakes, hugs, songs and tribal dances (the Africans, not the British, fortunately). All of our lives – back here in England and out there in rural South Africa – are different because we connected.

So what does that mean to you the reader, and me the writer, now I am back in the flow of work here in the UK? This newsletter, I hope, will encourage you to review your connections – whether they be personal, spiritual or in business. If you connected more, how would that help you grow? Or how could you help others grow by connecting with them?

What was also clear in South Africa was that connecting allowed a sharing of effort, ideas and creativity. It seems we can achieve far more together than we can individually – the power of synergy. Bev and I have visited this community as a couple three times before. Returning with a total group of sixteen had far more than eight times the impact! If you are running your own business, or even your own life, it can be a very lonely venture. But who said that we had to do everything on our own? Connecting with others helps us achieve more, for ourselves and for them.

In a business context, connection with customers, particularly potential customers, is an obvious area where we might benefit – and I always encourage people to look for effective ways to connect with their target market. But we can also grow by connecting with suppliers, competitors and others around our business. And connection is deeper than swapping business cards at a networking event!

Connection Quality

When thinking of a metaphor to use about connection, for some reason my mind filled with the picture of a 1950s telephone exchange – pictured in the films as a young pretty telephonist (or an old miserable nosey parker, but I digress) – with lots of wires and someone physically connecting each call by plugging in the leads. With that in mind, how can we consider improving our own connections?

You have to be plugged in:- to start with, you need your lead plugged into the network. That will mean reaching out and making contact. What action do you take on a regular basis to stay connected, personally and professionally? What efforts do you make to identify who to connect with and where to find them? How do you seek a connection?

You need a quality connection:- had a conversation with someone using a cellphone while on a train recently? A poor line and an intermittent signal disrupts the conversation and makes a true connection with the person almost impossible. If you are going to take the trouble to connect with someone, make that sure you create the best quality environment you can.

Multiple connections lead to crossed wires:- if we really want to connect with someone, it can help to make that a one-on-one interaction. Really focus on the individual, put aside other issues and listen to what they are saying – especially at networking events. If you let them talk, listen properly and engage with them, it is proven they will remember you more fondly.

Phones make calls in both directions:- I sometimes wonder if my Gran knows she can make outgoing calls on her phone – do you know someone similar? If we are going to establish connections with people, we need to be receptive to incoming connections, and be pro-active in sending out signals too. If you are trying to grow your client base, set yourself targets for outbound calls each day or week. In my experience, once you start making outbound calls, the inbound ones flow behind. I have never tried to explain it, I just see it happens!

Never discuss key plot twists on an open line:- why does someone brag about the murder on an old-fashioned line, so that old Mrs Wiggins at the exchange can tip off the local constabulary? In a business context, we need to remember when to be discreet. Being connected is not about being the village gossip – leave that to Mrs Wiggins.

So what action will you take as a result of this newsletter? Here are some ideas, please add your own (and you should know by now not to suggest “do nothing”):

- Review how you connect with people – are you doing the best you can?
- Develop a daily habit of making a number of connections – old contacts, new people, customers, suppliers etc.
- Improve the quality of your connections.
- Reach outside your usual circle and make a connection with someone new – perhaps a different business, or a different culture. See what you can learn!

Painless Business News

This week saw the start of a six month coaching contract with a large company in Hungary, working with their senior management team. This was a great opportunity to connect with a new place and a new culture. Thankfully, they were able to connect in English, as my Hungarian is currently limited to one word! Spending a few days a month in a foreign capital is going to be an interesting experience, and I am sure I will learn a lot that I can share in this newsletter. The first trip certainly gave me a couple of topics!

It was great to see the regulars and some new faces at the workshop to discuss Ethics in Business a few weeks ago. I am very lucky to be connected with some people who really think about how they conduct business, and we had an interesting debate. Some recent coaching work has also centred on differing perceptions of what is ethical within a business, and I do urge all of you to consider how you measure this. For some, legality is the key defining issue, but as the superb film *Amazing Grace* reminds us, slavery was legal once – but was it ethical?

Book Review

My film of the month is another based in South Africa, and on the subject of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. *Red Dust* stars Hilary Swank and Chiwetel Ejiofor and is based on a novel by Gillian Slovo (daughter of Joe Slovo). I saw it some time ago, but picked it out recently, because it was filmed in the Karoo, a beautiful part of South Africa, which I visited for the first time last month. In fact, the swimming pool which features in the film is across the road from the house I was staying in with a friend! Watch the film, and I am sure Graaff-Reinet will appear on your next holiday itinerary.

Every few months I stumble across a book that really makes me stop and think. I have just finished *Blink* by Malcom Gladwell, and it is just such a book. Gladwell also wrote *The Tipping Point* – in itself a seminal work on the statistics of marketing campaigns. *Blink* explores how our brain makes snap decisions (in the blink of an eye) and it is just fascinating. Having just returned from Africa, some of the academic research into sub-conscious racial stereotyping (in the minds of both white and black people) was just incredible. The sort of book that makes you want to follow-up each reference at the back to learn more! If you have any interest in what goes on in your mind (or those of customers) in the split second we form a first opinion, you must read this book.

Painless Puns

As always, a few quotes I have encountered in recent weeks, all by that prolific author Anonymous;

If you can't see the bright side, polish the dull side.

Man cannot discover new oceans until he has courage to lose sight of the shore.

You don't drown by falling in the water, you drown by staying there.

And some thoughts that may make you smile:

I'm changing banks. Last week I went in and asked the girl to check my balance. She pushed me over.

I had to get a new roof recently. When I asked the builder how much, he said "it's on the house".

When I started drafting this newsletter, I realised my pencil need sharpening. After struggling for a few minutes, I slammed it down and cried "This is no good, it's pointless".

Much like some of my puns!

Final Words

I hope you will find plenty of opportunity to grow by connection this month – you can always start by giving me feedback on the newsletter! And a second opportunity would be to forward it on to people you think might enjoy it – I am forever grateful to those of you who help ensure a steadily growing readership!

Whenever I sit to write these newsletters, all I ever hope is that you will take action and do something better this month, having read through my thoughts and applied them to your own situation. Create a great month!

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.