

James Butler's Newsletter #72

Amuse, Inform and Inspire

August 2008

I am blessed to live in a very community-minded village, here in South Oxfordshire. We manage to stage some truly inspiring events, such as the forthcoming Choko Beer Festival at the end of September.

This month saw the showing of Grease in the grounds of the village school – an open air movie with a fancy-dress party beforehand. To enter into the spirit necessitated the acquisition of the iconic slicked back hairdo sported by John Travolta. For someone as bald as me, it was going to take more than Grecian 2000 to achieve this look and I duly headed to my local Fancy Dress store for some assistance. What happened next seemed ideal newsletter material.

Tell me about it, stud



*Bev and I last weekend – almost
(Bev's on the left)*

I hope the title gets past the email filter police and I am of course quoting Sandy from the closing minutes of the movie. So, this is the story of my visit to Wall's Carnival Stores in Reading.

As I walked in, like any man on a shopping trip, I wanted to get in, get my wigs and leave (I say wigs, because Bev needed some help with the blond curls too). The store was floor to ceiling with fancy dress outfits, novelty items and general paraphernalia to do with parties.

I recovered from the shock of having a six-foot squirrel sat at the end of the counter, just within my peripheral vision, and approached the shop assistant. The lady smiled (my customer-service radar clicked into gear – a friendly start) and I explained I needed a wig to make my bald head look like John Travolta's.

The assistant refrained from saying "we sell outfits, we don't work miracles" and, as a result, went up in my estimation. From behind the counter, she pointed to the far wall and told me all the men's wigs are along the shelves on the back wall (I looked past the Darth Vader suits and saw there were dozens of wigs – I must go back sometime). I mentioned Bev's need in the Sandy department, and the assistant pointed to another wall, where the ladies' wigs were. Blondes, apparently, were somewhere in the middle (presumably having more fun).

I aimlessly wandered along the two walls, struggling to find what I want.

Let us reflect on what has just happened here. I asked for help from the assistant. She was pleasant, cheerful and gave me accurate directions to where I could help myself to what I wanted. And then she returned to discussing the Olympics with her colleague. On the face of it, she was courteous, and I am sure if her manager asked her how she interacted with staff, she would say she got on well and always tried to be helpful.

Yet I was struggling to make my purchase, and my short-stay parking time span and even-shorter-stay shopping attention time span were rapidly disappearing. As a customer, something was missing, but it's quite possible I would never have realised, if I hadn't met her colleague.

You're The One That I Want

Another shop assistant (I wish I had asked her name) appeared and asked if she could help. I explained my need for wigs. She asked about the event, reminisced about the movie, got excited about the party and really engaged with what I was getting involved with. She took me to the right wigs. She went upstairs to see if any better ones were in the stock room.

She asked if I had all I needed for the rest of the costume (and didn't accept the usual male "I guess so" – I had to describe it). She took me to the two types of leather jacket I might have wanted to buy or hire to complete my T-birds look.

By the time I left, this lady had engaged me as customer, shared my fun in getting a costume together, and motivated me to write about her in this newsletter. If her boss asked her how she interacted with staff, I bet she would say she got on well and always tried to be helpful, just like her colleague.

But can you see the difference? For me, one was adequate and would just about have made the sale. The other went the extra mile and could quite easily and ethically have doubled or trebled the amount I spent in the store.

Who would you want in your store, working for you? How do the people in your team (including you) appear to your customers? Are you all genuinely interested, ready to engage and ready to expand your customer's horizons?

I wonder if the manager of Wall's Carnival Stores has any idea of the variance in service his staff show? Or any idea of just how could his or her store could be, if everyone had the attitude of the second assistant?

If I came into your business, would I see the first assistant – adequate but not engaging, or would I see the second – world class and definitely generating more sales, more return visits and more referrals? What do you need to do to make it the latter?

Painless Business News

As trailed in the last newsletter, I had a fun time telling a good crowd at The Late Breakfast in Abingdon how they could learn business lessons from Abba. I hope I managed to underline my belief that working for yourself should be fun first, work second. After all, if we set the rules, they may as well be fun ones (and thanks to Clare Lock for the inspiration, having Abba in her office all those years ago). And a tip to all those who do public speaking, it really helps to pad out a talk if you play music clips all the time – especially if most of the audience love the music!

August also saw me celebrate six years of working for myself – which I marked in the company of some lovely businesswomen who each had their own achievements to celebrate. This was part of my ongoing regular workshops for like-minded business people in the Oxford area, which have now been going for four or five years. If you are interested in hearing about opportunities to meet other people and learn about business in a (relatively) structured setting, let me know – our next event will be in late October.

Book Review

The summer has been taken up with reading in preparation for my second book, and one of the texts I wanted to have another look at, and actually finish this time, was *E-Myth Mastery* by Michael Gerber. Most of you will know that I am a huge fan of Gerber's *E-Myth Revisited* (a required text for anyone who runs their own business), and I had high hopes for this one. However, it is a far heavier read (literally and metaphorically – I had the hardback edition) and not one I would recommend to any other than the hardened Gerber fan. As always, some good ideas to absorb, but not as life changing as *E-Myth Revisited*.

A recent leisure read, courtesy of my lovely library van that visits each week, was *Pint-sized Ireland* by Evan McHugh. Despite the Celtic name, McHugh is actually Australian, and the book follows him and a female friend as they backpack round Ireland in search of a Guinness. Not a brilliant book (how many variations on got up, hitch-hiked, got drunk on Guinness can there be), but a beautiful ending (so stop now if you intend to read the book). After much research, the author concluded that "the best Guinness is in the glass, in your hand, in the pub that you're in right now." Extending that to so much else in life, McHugh concludes "if you end up enjoying yourself so much that you forget all about searching, my guess is you've probably just found what you're looking for". I love that!

Painless Puns

If my experience at Wall's Carnival Stores has got you thinking about issues with your staff, consider this quote from Gerber in *E-Myth Mastery*: "*The fish stinks from the head down.*"

So, before you berate your team, you need to reflect on the role of the head (you!).

A quote that goes to the heart of today's newsletter:

People don't care how much you know - until they know how much you care.
John C Maxwell

This fantastic pun gives me the chance to plug www.chokobeerfestival.org.uk just one more time:

Beauty is in the eye of the beer holder.

Final Words

This newsletter topic is one I have a lot of passion about, and I hope it inspires you to work with your team to raise your game in interacting with customers. It is a topic I adore working with clients on, so if you would appreciate some external support, please email or call and we can talk through the best approach for your team.

And if you want to see the Bev and James version of Sandy and Danny, you need to visit the Cholsey village noticeboard, or reply to this email and convince me to share the photo. Have a great month, and remember – Grease is the word, is the word, is the word!

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.