

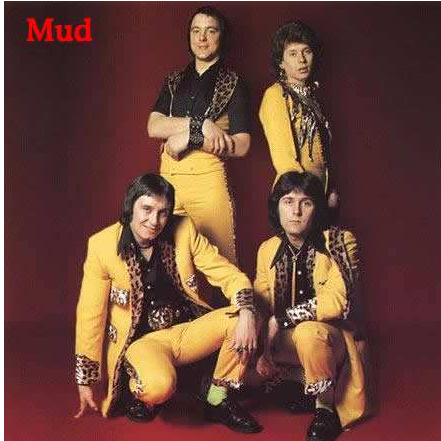
James Butler's Newsletter #76

Amuse, Inform and Inspire

December 2008

As the year draws to a close, our time can become filled with writing Christmas cards, shopping trips for things we didn't know we needed (and probably don't), the erecting of more flashing lights than party night in Vegas and, of course, some inelegant bopping to 70s floor-fillers at the staff Christmas party. We also have the opportunity to revisit all those cheesy Christmas hits that never seem to go away. Well, one of those Christmas Classics gave me pause for thought this month.

Lonely This Christmas



This year has certainly been an interesting one for anyone who runs a business. Large or small, companies have been buffeted by the continuous negative press regarding the recession – affecting either their own optimism, or the confidence to spend amongst their customers.

Now, more than ever, is when it can feel lonely at Christmas – either within the business for the one at the top, or the business can feel lonely if customers are neglecting it.

What to do?

In the six years I have been coaching business owners, a truism I have observed often is that it is lonely at the top. Whatever the size of the enterprise, the one at the top of the pyramid occasionally looks around and sees no-one they confide in, no-one they can bounce ideas off, no-one they can be vulnerable and unsure with.

In tough times, this can be especially true, so my message to you is don't be lonely this Christmas, and look for a support team around you. Who can help?

- Your team – key players within the business may be able to offer counsel and support. Use the talent you have in the business and involve them in your plan to ride any storm, but be wary of sharing any uncertainty with them, as it may undermine confidence within the business.
- Your peers – other business leaders – can be a useful source of support and empathy. Who do you know who you can trust to chat over the challenges you are facing? Who will understand your issues?
- Your friends – which of your friends can provide a listening ear, or a buddy to share a beer with, when you need them? They will have your best interests at heart, but may not understand the pressure of running a business. How can you use them for some of your support?
- Your kids, or your dog – sometimes all we need is to get away and get some perspective. The troubles of a business in a recession can shrink away when reading a story to a toddler, or walking the moors with the pooch. Don't deny yourself that restorative time when under pressure – that's when you need it most.
- Your coach – well, I had to didn't I?! Having someone who knows business, has your agenda at heart and is not emotionally connected to your success or failure can be a real benefit in times of turmoil. A coach can hear all your thoughts, and enable you to develop your strategy for moving forward. I know a good one if you want one!

With a lot of people holding off spending until the New Year, the last few weeks have been tough in many sectors. So you may be feeling lonely because your customers appear to be ignoring you. If that's the case, come out of your corner fighting and counter the loneliness by being proactive yourself:

- If you or the business is quiet, use the time to build your capability to connect with customers – revisit your marketing communications, clean up your database of contacts, research the details of your next targeted prospects.
- Actually start making contact. Some people work between Christmas and New Year – but gatekeepers often don't, so maybe it's worth a few calls over the holidays? Or use the opportunity of a fresh year to make contact – a phone call, a newsletter, a sales promotion, whatever is appropriate in your market place.
- Remember to tend the growing crops. Farmers at this time of year have more to do in tending what is already sown, not in ploughing new furrows. How well have you tended your existing and recent customers?
- Make new friends – not customers necessarily, but strategic alliance with suppliers, complementary product providers, trade bodies, associations, client groups etc. Chances are, they are feeling lonely too!

So, don't feel lonely this Christmas, just remember that we get by with a little help from our friends!

Painless Business News

I struggle to see where 2008 has gone – a sign of age perhaps! As I look forward to 2009 I see many opportunities and I try to keep my in-built optimism with regard to the wider economy. I hope I continue to get the opportunity to work with great clients and businesses, whether direct through Painless Business, or through my work at Cranfield and elsewhere. In 2008 I learnt that opportunities can often come from off the radar, and we have to be tuned to spot them when they arrive – and then persevere to make them happen. That could be my theme for 2009!

As I mentioned last month, 7th January 2009 sees me addressing the best networking group in Oxfordshire, the Abingdon Late Breakfast. My task is to entertain and inspire them to have a "Rockin' 2009". I have a few songs in my mind, but am open to reader suggestions. Anything with a lively beat and a connection to a business lesson (however tenuous) considered.

Book Review

Another book this month by someone I met at Cranfield – this time a past-participant, Dan Collins (with David Thompson). A very inspiring book (*Trust Unwrapped*), which stood out immediately by the way it was marketed. The book was in the bedroom in the hotel at Cranfield, with a label inviting me to take it home – and commenting that he trusted me to pay online for it. This is very in keeping with the thrust of the book, which is a must-read for someone in small business, I believe. I think I shall be referring to it again in future newsletters.

My other reading is Timothy Gallwey's *The Inner Game of Work* – a book I have returned to after a few years. Very interesting thesis, and great for those of us who have inner voices which stand between us and our full potential.

Painless Puns

Many of you liked the Bush references last month, so much so that when I saw on the news someone had thrown a shoe at him, I wondered if it was a reader!

This month I shall pinch a couple of quotes from Dan's book, and a few new ones:

Trust is cheaper than lawyers. Charles Handy (thanks Dan)

Leadership is not about demanding trust and respect. It's about giving trust and respect.
Lord Bilimora, founder of Cobra Beer (Dan again)

To be trusted is a greater compliment than to be loved. George MacDonald

Many of us think of supporting charities at this time of year, and I loved this take on the Beckham's charitable work: "*Victoria Beckham gives away all her old clothes to starving children. Well, who else are they going to fit?*" Pauline Calf (Steve Coogan)

As an optimist in the current economic climate, I often wonder if Jean Kerr knew me when she said "*If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs, it is possible you haven't grasped the gravity of the situation.*"

Final Words

As part of my contribution to charity, I don't send Christmas cards and instead make a donation to www.choko.org.uk. This helps families in need in South Africa, and reduces back pain amongst postmen. As I write this, I can see how that isn't good for a lot of my clients who are chiropractors, osteopaths or physios. Might have to keep that quiet in future!

Anyway, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you Happy Holidays and a prosperous New Year. I hope you will continue reading these missives through 2009, and I hope we can connect and/or work together in some way during the year.

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.

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