

Whatever your view on the current global outlook, what is beyond doubt is the widespread feeling of uncertainty in the business world, and amongst the general public. The economic situation is the perfect example of my topic this month – if we focus on the negative too much, we can create our own problems.

Always Look on the Bright Side of Life



Eric Idle's chirpy singing, at the close of the Python film is a classic moment in movie history, but the lyrics could have a more serious message.

*If life seems jolly rotten,
There's something you've forgotten,
And that's to laugh and smile and dance and sing.*

Do you see things as rotten, or do you see the brighter side of life?

Before I go any further, I want to recognise that I feel lucky to be blessed with an incurable optimism. If I hadn't, I may have given up chasing girls long before I met Bev. I do tend to look for the positive in situations and am generally a cheerful chap. I know other people find it harder to do that.

Yet, along with my optimism I have a belief that how we react to what happens in life is largely in our control – because that is in our heads, not anywhere else. Of course, bereavement, illness and similar tragedies will make it harder to control our reactions, but I seem to see so many examples of people being ground down because of the way they view the world, or the way they react to events, and that seems tragic to me.

In my travels around the world I have seen people living in very disadvantaged circumstances. The children in the community we support in South Africa, people in India, Nepal and even people in the UK and the USA. Yet in the face of sometimes unimaginable hardship and suffering, I have witnessed great hope, belief and optimism. This makes me feel we all have an opportunity to look on a brighter side of life, if even they can.

The question is, how? Telling ourselves "Chin up" is not normally enough. Here are some of my thoughts – things I have seen work for me and others around me:

Show gratitude – we can all be guilty of forgetting our good fortune amongst the hurly-burly of life. Stopping regularly to reflect on what we have to be thankful for can help us be positive – if we have health, shelter, sustenance, loved ones, we can realise what we have, rather than missing what we don't.

Avoid bad news – our newspapers and radio stations seem full of messages designed to make us gloomy. Stories of attacks on children, knife crime, job losses and so on appear to sell papers, yet for most of us don't reflect the world we actually live in. So we get gloomy over something that is outside our control, and doesn't really affect us. What's the point in that? Not buying a newspaper, and taking in less news, really helps me brighten up!

Don't get sucked in – gloomy people are like Death Eaters in Harry Potter – they can suck the positivity out of you. But you don't have to fall into their trap – you can politely resist getting drawn into gloomy conversations. Sometimes being aware that you are at risk of being sucked in is enough for you to naturally react and protect yourself from the Death Eaters.

Seek the brighter side – make sure you spend time with people who are upbeat (but be sure you're not their version of a Death Eater!), get regular access to comedy or amusing stories jokes or connect with some good news stories in some way. My friend Nigel is superb at lifting my spirits – he has a regular supply of funny jokes (most too rude to share with you here) and a real can-do attitude. Who in your life is like that?

Stop and listen to yourself – are you being a Death Eater? How do you react to situations, what language do you use when talking to others? Observe how you are, and see how you could use different language or react differently in order to see a brighter side.

Whistle - When you're chewing life's gristle, don't grumble, give a whistle. And this'll help things turn out for the best. Yes, that's Monty Python again. Now, join in for the chorus, "Always look on the bright side of life..."

With the particular situation within the economy at the moment, I accept that if you are/were an estate agent or a house building firm then things could be pretty grim. For the majority however, it seems to be more of a belt-tightening issue than an end-of-life-as-we-know-it issue. Especially with your customers or business contacts, don't get sucked into the vortex of doom that would make a recession inevitable. I am still talking to businesses all the time that are growing, expanding and doing well, so the bright side is out there if we look!

Painless Business News

The latest major development at Painless Towers is my appointment to the team working on the Business Growth Programme at Cranfield University. This is a very powerful training course for owner-managers of medium-sized companies and it is a great pleasure to be involved. I suspect that meeting this range of businesses will teach me things I can share with other clients and readers of the newsletter, and of course I hope to be of use to the Programme Participants I get to work with. This development has taught me some lessons about persistence, and the importance of preparation and focus already. Thank you to the clients who agreed to be references for me.

I am very excited by my next scheduled speaking engagement – at the Late Breakfast, Abingdon on 6 August. In deference to the recently-released Mamma Mia, we shall be covering "What Business Can Learn From Abba". Longer-standing readers will recall a newsletter on that theme, and it promises to be good fun. Rumours that I will be dancing are definitely exaggerated! Visit www.thelatebreakfast.co.uk for details.

My other big project of the summer is a Beer festival, in my home village, to raise funds for Choko – the charity which supports a community in South Africa. We are raising funds for a centre for young people with special needs so if you like real ale, or know someone who does, please spread the word and come along on the 27 September. Details at www.chokobeerfestival.org.uk.

Book Review

My recent family holiday, when I resisted teasing my nephews for a moment or two, meant I could enjoy Lance Armstrong's second book, *Every Second Counts*. Now there's a guy who looks on the brighter side. Incredible mental attitude in the face of adversity – both his health and his sport, and a very enjoyable read. There is only so much "we cycled up an Alp today" I can read, but the book intersperses the story of his later Tour victories with a lot of the background to his work with cancer sufferers.

Another book I finished on holiday was *Affluenza* by Oliver James. I loved the main idea of the book – that our consumerist society is creating mental illness, and we could all benefit from getting off that treadmill – but I found it very difficult to read. I am very conscious of criticising other authors at the moment, as I work on my own second book, but the message of James' book seemed to get lost amongst far too much padding and quasi-research.

Painless Puns

At least Oliver James avoided bad jokes, which I seem unable to do, but first some inspiring quotes:

The thing you set your mind on is the thing you ultimately become. Nathaniel Hawthorne

There is nothing impossible to him who will try. Alexander The Great

And now for the jokes you've been waiting for:

What did the pregnant woman say to the nurse as she was wheeled into the delivery room? I'm dilated to meet you.

This weekend I caught up with my best friend Graeme, a proud Scot. The next one is for him.

What's the difference between a Scotsman and a canoe? I've seen a canoe tip.

Final Words

Welcome to the many new readers this month. I am just on the cusp of a readership milestone, so if you know anyone who might appreciate my thoughts each month, please forward this email.

I hope this month you will find an opportunity to reflect on how you can stay looking at the brighter side of life – I do believe it is possible for each of us. In closing, it's back to Eric Idle:

*When you're feeling in the dumps,
Don't be silly chumps.
Just purse your lips and whistle.
That's the thing.*

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.