

James Butler's Newsletter #67

Amuse, Inform and Inspire

March 2008

Don't worry, this month there will be no holiday snaps! I am glad many of you like the story of my walk in The Narrows, but it is not good manners to talk about one's own travels too much. And anyway, since the last issue my travelling has only consisted of a monsoonal weekend in Lyme Regis!

I consider myself lucky in many ways (for a discussion of what makes us lucky, see Issue 20, almost four years ago!) and one area where I feel blessed has been my relaxed approach to selling. Throughout my career I have instinctively wanted to sell, and this has helped me overcome uncertainty and fears, and build business. As I prepared to write this newsletter, I realised that at some level we are all salesmen – whether we are selling our services, a product or “selling” ourselves to a new date, or a new employer. Given that we are doing it all the time, what can we learn to be better at it?

Your Favourite Salesmen

As you go about your life in the next few weeks, observe how different people 'sell' to you – whether it be someone in a shop, or someone convincing you to support their project. Mentally note what you think does and doesn't work. So many clients feel that selling is some uncomfortable, unethical, slimy practice. Yet in my experience, successful selling is actually about the exact opposite.

Believing in the product helps the ethics – apocryphal tales of used car salesmen abound – they can sell you a repaired wreck and convince you it is the deal of the century. But if you are reading this, chances are that isn't what you do for a living. As far as I know, my reader demographic does not include Arthur Daley or his progeny. If you believe in what you have to sell, it is ethical to share it with other people, and let them decide. So get over the ethical concern, are you sure it's not just an excuse for inaction?

And if you don't believe in your product, call me because I am sure one of the Painless Team can help coach you on doing work you do believe in.

Set the tone – in the last week I have visited two outlets investigating a major purchase. At one outlet I was greeted by a lovely, bubbly and enthusiastic young woman, who was captured by my enthusiasm, encouraged our interest and helpfully answered all our questions (however naïve). At the other, the sales guy was very negative, seemed to want to make us out as inept (which we were, but was it good tactics to remind us?) and clearly wanted to shape our opinion to suit what he had to sell, not what we wanted to buy. Who do you think is in the lead to get the business? How do you interact with those you want to sell to or influence? Are you a positive or negative presence? How can you improve?

Customer is king – this doesn't mean they are always right, but without customers, most businesses will fail. The focus of any business must be to keep and gain customers by selling them what they want, profitably. So, within certain personal boundaries, indulge your customer to help the sales process. I recently bought some army surplus cargo trousers. The saleswoman was a master in her craft. Within an inch, she knew my waist and leg length just by eye, and she knew her stock, and she knew exactly how to chat positively about my purchase. There is now only one place I would go or recommend for army surplus gear. What do you do to indulge the people you are selling to? What can you do to up your game?

Ask and it shall be given unto you – whilst I have learnt that this particular biblical promise is not fully accurate (or they weren't referring to nights of passion with Sandra Bullock when they wrote it), it does have some relevance to sales. If the sales process has gone well, you won't need to ask (I was already set on my cargo trousers), but some customers hesitate before deciding. That's the time to politely, calmly and subtly close the deal. A shop assistant may say "Shall I ring those up on the till for you?" A therapist may say "So, when are you free in two weeks for the next treatment?" A first-dater may refrain from saying "Call me if you want to go out again" and may say "How about the cinema next Friday?" (Having not dated since 1990, I appreciate I am not the best qualified to give dating tips. Who knows, nowadays first dates may just end with "What would you like for breakfast?")

Whatever you want more of in life (more customers, higher fees, better wages, a date with the bloke in Marketing), the chances are you will have to sell the prospect of it to someone else. Getting comfortable with being persuasive can bring huge benefit – and can be part of a painless way of living life. What can you learn from the favourite salesmen in your life?

Painless Business News

As I like to practice what I preach, I measure what happens with this newsletter. One measure is how does it do bringing me new clients (if you're interested, two this month – welcome to all new clients!). The software I use tells me how many people open it each month – and I was delighted to see that last month saw a significant increase – to the highest level ever. The challenge is to consider why, so I can repeat the success! Whatever the reason, it pleases me that so many people take the time to read what I put out – so thank you for being one of the growing band of readers.

Regular readers will know I organise frequent workshops in South Oxfordshire, and the next is in a couple of weeks. At 5pm on April 8th we will be spending a couple of hours discussing "Best of Breed" – what makes a business good at what it does. These workshops are a great opportunity to explore how you can improve your business, by learning from others in a supportive environment. So, to model my tips from above, what would you like for breakfast? Sorry, I mean please call today and reserve your place!

Book Review

One advantage of business trips to Budapest, and holding patterns over Heathrow, is I get plenty of time to read. This month, Hungary meant I could enjoy *May Contain Nuts* by John O'Farrell. Firstly, I am always impressed when an author writes in the first person of the opposite gender (having never understood how women work, I marvel at O'Farrell's insight). Secondly, it is a very humorous insight into modern parenting (especially Yummy Mummies). For an observer rather than participant in child rearing, some of the caricatures were very funny! And there was a very good deeper message there about just what is important in life, and how we can get caught up in the rat-race far too easily. An easy read that also gets you thinking!

Painless Puns

As one waits for security screening at Heathrow (which isn't as long as the doom-mongers make out), the security hall has some huge billboard advertising. One I want to share with you features Tiger Woods, promoting the consultancy Accenture. With a picture of Tiger in the long grass, and the caption "We know what it takes to be a Tiger", it has the graphic:

What you did – 10%
What you do next – 90%

(Click [here](#) if you want to see the picture)

I think that if you give some thought to what that means, that is a truly inspiring thought – what you do from here is far more important than what you have done before.

Hats off to the marketing guys at Accenture!

Picking up on John O'Farrell's sub-text about the rat-race, I liked this from Lily Tomlin:

The trouble with the rat-race is that even if you win, you're still a rat.

I am indebted to my friend Nigel for many things, not least these great puns:

*I met this bloke with a didgeridoo and he was playing Dancing Queen on it.
I thought, "That's Aboriginal."*

*I told my girlfriend I had a job in a bowling alley. She said "Tenpin?"
I said, "No, permanent."*

Final Words

Being comfortable about selling ourselves is very much in the sphere of "what we do next" – whatever you have done until now doesn't really matter. By watching what others do that you like, you can learn how to persuade others to your point of view – and then you will get more of what you want, and less of what you don't.

I help people do that, in some way or another, every working day. That's why I enjoy my work, and why I would love to chat with you about how we can do the same for you.

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.