

James Butler's Newsletter #72

Amuse, Inform and Inspire

September 2008

Without wanting to turn this newsletter into a village magazine, there could only ever be one inspiration for the September issue – the First Choko Beer Festival, held this weekend in my village.

Long-term readers will know I have been heavily involved in the organisation of the event, and that Choko is the charity I helped found and continue to support closely. Long-term readers will also know I can find newsletter inspiration almost anywhere – so what did I learn this weekend?

Beer: so much more than just a breakfast drink



The first thing I learnt was that for some, beer is a morning drink – and we were delighted to see our first customers well before noon on Saturday! But that wasn't the main point of this newsletter.

I think we can draw five lessons from my experience on Saturday, all of which should give you pause for thought in your own lives or workplaces.

It's about people – whether we measure success in pounds raised (a phenomenal success) or in the vibe we created (likewise) or in the way a team of over 30 people pulled together for a common goal (even more so), that success is ultimately about people. The money is only good if we spend it to help the people supported by the causes we have chosen to fund. The vibe we created and the team atmosphere are completely about people.

In business we can easily forget the people, and focus on numbers, spreadsheets, business plans and targets. My learning from the weekend is that the planning is required (we were home to the EU To-Do List Mountain for a week or two), but the people make the planning happen. **What do you need to do to engage people in making your plan happen? What people are affected by your plans (customers, staff, other stakeholders)?**

The trappings are important, but the product is fundamental – we were all novices at running beer festivals, though we had great support from the guys at Haddenham. So we spent Saturday morning studiously preparing the venue, dealing with Health and Safety, security, money, layout, design, and totally forgot to check that the beer was ready to serve! Beer Festival with bad beer equals abject failure – we had allowed the trappings to distract from the fundamental. Now, I speak regularly about the importance of the trappings in creating loyal customers and active referrers – but this was a good reminder that all that is in addition to a quality product or service! **What do you do to maintain quality of service, both the fundamentals and the trappings? What might you be forgetting that is more important to the customer than to you?**

Detail delivers the vision – our organising committee combined those who had the big picture vision of what the event could be like, and those who have the attention to detail to bring it all together on the day. Whilst they may not all have seen eye-to-eye all the time, we pulled it off. It is not common for one person to combine both skills, so as you build a business, evaluate where your strengths lie and seek support from others with complimentary skills. Without the creative thinking and visionary zeal, there is not the need for detailed planning, because bold steps are rarely taken. Without the detailed planning, the vision rarely materialises, because little steps are rarely taken. **Where do you lie on this spectrum, and what support do you need to take bold steps toward a vision, whilst ensuring the little steps and details are taken too?**

Revel in success – pulling off a great event, whether a village fund-raiser or building a business is surely a cause for celebration. When your team meet targets, or pass milestones, do you stop and reflect on the effort and energy taken to get there? Too often we race onto the next project (yes, people are already asking when the next beer festival will be) without enjoying the moment, or we focus on what we could have done better, rather than what we excelled at. Why not just wallow in the satisfaction of achievement just once in a while?! **What do you do to revel in your own success? How do you share that with your customers, staff and other stakeholders? Who needs an excuse for a party?!**

Don't be afraid to ask – I have the reputation of being poor at delegation – holding on to too many tasks and becoming overwhelmed. The enormity of work involved in the beer festival, and the pleasant conundrum of being very busy at work, meant this was just not possible. To find people to fill 15-20 jobs over a 10 or 11 hour period, I had to call in favours from almost everyone I know (even my Mum travelled 180 miles to help!). And on the day we asked people if they would help if we organised a second one – and over 30 people gave their name and number. **Who do you need to ask for help? Where do you need help? What can you let go of, to allow you to do the remainder more effectively?**

And finally, perhaps the biggest factor in our success was totally out of control. In a year where the general consensus is that we have had a wet year, we had six days of unbroken sunshine (once the fog cleared) – so we could set up and pack down in the dry, and the families came for a day in the sun at the event. Now, if I had the power to control the weather, there would be no stopping me!

Painless Business News

With my holiday and the beer festival, and a work trip to Hungary in between, there hasn't been a lot of opportunity for major news to develop on the business front, but two milestones have passed this month, which I shall mention.

Firstly, I started my work with the Business Growth and Development programme at Cranfield University, which has been hugely energising. The programme is brilliantly designed and the content is first rate, but the main boost has been spending time with 50 successful entrepreneurs, and sharing their energy for building a successful business. It is also interesting to note they share many of the same challenges as owners of smaller businesses – which should bring hope to those smaller companies!

Secondly, last week I passed an examination of my coaching ability, meaning I am now well on the way to the next level of certification with my professional body, the International Coach Federation. The process has helped me tighten my game when working with clients, and see how I can grow in the future. Thanks to those clients who agreed to have their sessions recorded as part of this process. I believe it leaves me better equipped to service any of my clients going forward.

Book Review

Holidays are often an opportunity to enjoy some good airport-bookshop thrillers, and this time I did enjoy one of the Jack Reacher series by Lee Child. Jack's my hero, though Bev assures me that a guy who never changes his clothes or takes a wash kit would not have the success with women that Jack has. She's such a realist.

My current read is *Where Underpants Come From* by Joe Bennett – it is effectively a travelogue through modern industrial China, with the sourcing of cheap clothing as the theme. I loved this piece about a local Chinese restaurant:

Our main dish is duck in sauce. I delve with chopsticks and extract, to my surprise, a mussel still in its shell. I suck it clean of sauce. The sauce is excellent. The mussel is the duck's beak.

A reminder of why I always ate vegetarian when I travelled to the likes of India and Nepal!

Painless Puns

I will allow you to decide which of these are inspirational and which of these are puns, but they all have a common theme:

You're not drunk if you can lie on the floor without holding on. Dean Martin

Here's to alcohol, the cause of – and solution to – all life's problems. Homer Simpson

Work is the curse of the drinking class. Oscar Wilde

Sir, if you were my husband, I would poison your drink. Lady Astor
Madam, if you were my wife, I would drink it. Winston Churchill, in reply

And in case you were wondering, the quip about beer being more than a breakfast drink is from an advertisement for Whitstran Brewery in the USA (according to the internet).

Final Words

I know that many of the 500 people who came on Saturday found inspiration at the bottom of their glass, I hope you have found inspiration somewhere in this newsletter. It only remains for me to welcome the many new subscribers this month, thank the subscribers who kindly sponsored barrels of beer and suggest you watch this space for details of the 2009 festival!

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.