

# James Butler's Newsletter #77

Amuse, Inform and Inspire

January 2009

Best wishes to all readers for the new year – I hope 2009 proves to be a prosperous one for you. We live in interesting economic times, but you can rely on this newsletter to be a monthly dose of cheerfulness and good news each month! In this issue, I explain what I learnt from a recent visit to a London restaurant.

## *Attitude, not aptitude*

This month the lucky Mrs Butler and I had a long weekend up in the big smoke, travelling up from our country life in Oxfordshire to visit some museums, take in some sights and to try some cuisine not usually available out in the sticks.

For this trip, we settled upon the idea of Caribbean food – something neither of us have tried before. We had found a restaurant near where we were staying and were looking forward to it for weeks. And that is how we ended up at Island Fusion in Crystal Palace ([www.islandfusion.co.uk](http://www.islandfusion.co.uk)).

Having walked miles around a museum during the day, we wanted to eat early and were the first to arrive. Our waitress showed us to our table (under a picture of a Caribbean sunset – all that was missing was the sand between our toes and the tropical warmth!). When serving us, our waitress (whose name is Kimono) seemed nervous, and managed to mess several things up in a row – for example, she initially gave us wine menus and no food menus, then dripped red wine when she poured our wine, and peaked with spilling half a glass of our wine over the table (luckily not on either of us). In many restaurants this would have led us to be grumpy, reduced our enjoyment of the meal, and possibly led us to complain.

But none of that happened, because despite her clumsiness, Kimono was fully engaged in our desire to try her culture's food, and enthusiastically talked us through the menu, and soon had us ordering bammy, festival, plantain, jerk and other interesting dishes. In fact, we ordered more than we might have done, on her (correct) recommendation. So, instead of having a bad meal, defined by some spilled wine, we had a superb time and I would recommend the restaurant to anyone.

If we were recruiting or rewarding Kimono on her aptitude, she'd be in trouble (based on our experience - she may be great the rest of the time). She didn't perform what I consider some of the basics of front-of-house work adequately. Yet, if we were to recruit or reward on attitude – the ability to connect with a customer, ensure they enjoy their meal, and create a raving fan, she gets 10 out of 10. In an ideal world we would have both, but if we had to trade, what would you prefer?

This got me thinking about the businesses I work with and you, my readership. Are your customers receiving competent but dispassionate service, or are they receiving service like Kimono gives – not perfect functionally, but inspiring in terms of engagement?

With trading conditions as competitive as ever at the moment, it is even more important that we engage with our customers, get them coming back and get them talking positively about us. It is therefore even more important that your customer-facing staff really work on their attitude with customers, not just their aptitude. How can you get them to step up a level?

If you do just one thing to improve your business this year, this would be a great project to choose. How will you improve the attitude to customers in your organisation?

## *Painless Business News*

Just recently, the official statistics confirmed what we have known for a while - we have officially been experiencing 'the R word'. Print and broadcast media are having a field day with their daily news stories, so I want you all to know that if you ever need cheering up, I am at the end of a phone or an email. I am determined to be a bastion of cheerfulness in 2009, and I am happy to share that with you. Working with the great Nigel Day, I hope to bring you in the next few weeks a project that will help lift the gloom (sorry, it won't be better jokes in my newsletters). Please watch this space.

In the meantime, I regularly meet people who are having successes in business, but feel reluctant to mark or celebrate it because of the wider gloom. I hereby give you permission to celebrate the good times (with Kool & the Gang if you have to) and send me details - I am very happy to hear good news stories!

## *Book Review*

My best read in the last month has to be a gift from Bev at Christmas. *The Greatest Day in History: How the Great War Really Ended* is absolutely fascinating - using contemporary diaries and other sources to weave together the last few days of the war, from the viewpoint of some of the key protagonists, and others who would come to later fame (a certain A. Hitler, for example). I know it isn't a business book, and you may struggle to find self-help motivation tips within it (although "Don't go to war and get your head shot off" has always been a mantra for me) but I would highly, highly recommend it. I'd also recommend having a lovely wife to buy you nice Christmas presents!

## *Painless Puns*

There is just one quote with which I could start, given the topic of this issue:

*It's your attitude, not your aptitude, that determines your altitude.* Zig Ziglar

Ziglar is a legendary motivational writer and speaker, and another of his great quotes is:

*People often say that motivation doesn't last. Well, neither does bathing. That's why we recommend it daily.*

My good friend John recently celebrated a significant birthday (without Kool & the Gang, but with Abba - which is good enough) and after the last newsletter he sent the following quote from Alan Greenspan, formerly head of the Federal Reserve:

*I guess I should warn you, if I turn out to be particularly clear, you've probably misunderstood what I've said.*

Thanks to Phil, my old boss and recent émigré to self-employed status, for the following:

*A member of Parliament to Disraeli: 'Sir, you will either die on the gallows or of some unspeakable disease.' 'That depends, Sir,' said Disraeli, 'whether I embrace your policies or your mistress.'*

I heard today that the Emperor Penguin may be extinct by the end of the century (lucky them, I'll be dead long before that). The item reminded me of this one-liner:

*I wrote a book on penguins. Paper would have been better.* Gary Delaney

## *Final Words*

However we are affected by the economic climate, I do believe all we can do is take control of what we can and seek to do our best at that. Working on the attitude within you and your business is a powerful place to start. Aptitude can follow (unless you're a brain surgeon, in which case 'right first time' is a handy motto to follow).

And if you are ever anywhere near Crystal Palace in London, please stop for a meal at Island Fusion. Ask for Kimono, and say hello from me. Her attitude is definitely increasing her altitude.

Warmest regards

James Butler

email: james@painlessbusiness.com    voice: +44 1491 659073    © James Butler 2009  
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