

James Butler's Newsletter #83

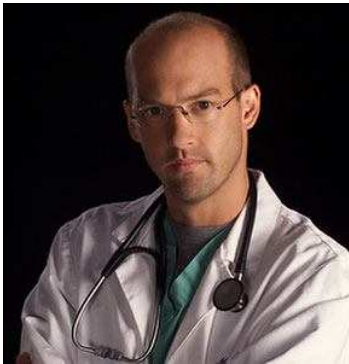
Amuse, Inform and Inspire

July 2009

Firstly, welcome to all the new subscribers – especially those from the Society of Homeopaths and from BCOM. Secondly, thanks to those who responded to last month's newsletter with a wealth of background and trivia on *Dragnet*. Obviously there are some real fans out there!

I know that many readers will appreciate this issue's TV reference – one I use regularly. *ER* is without doubt the best drama series I've ever followed (we still mourn its passing in our house), and has such great potential for metaphor and analogy.

Check The Pulse



It is a regular mantra of mine that business owners need to check the numbers – and I have drawn comparisons before with the monitors used for intensive care patients, in series like *ER*. Until this month, I was in the lucky position of only ever having seen those in a TV drama.

In the last few weeks, someone very close to me has been unwell, and needed a major operation. When someone you love is on a blood pressure monitor, the context starts to change, and you see things differently.

In the weeks since I was a nervous relative in the ICU, I have reflected on what lessons I could share from this life-changing experience. I used to tell clients and those listening to my talks and courses, that it was “all about the numbers” – and I still firmly believe that.

But I might change the way in which those numbers are considered. Let's be clear, I firmly believe that in order to thrive, a business owner needs to know a number of key metrics in their business – at the very least revenue, gross and net profit, performance against last year and performance against budget. I would suggest a second tier that could include client sources, average revenue per customer, retention rates and customer satisfaction. All of these are worth watching if you want your business to prosper.

But other factors need to be included, too. I have always had a holistic approach to business – and I include in my training events a number of exercises to help business owners place their company's aspirations in the context of their wider goals – individual and family ambitions. That is why I am so impressed with the Business Growth and Development Programme (BGP) – it has four themes throughout, one of which is “Me”.

So, my challenge to readers this month is to do two things:

1. Set out what key numbers you need to monitor and measure in your business, and implement the systems to produce and review them, at least monthly.
2. Take some time to think what else is important in your life, outside of work, and create the same impetus to measure and monitor how you are fulfilling your ambitions there. Then prioritise your time and energy on what is truly most important to you.

When you are stood beside a hospital bed, watching a blood pressure monitor and hoping it rises above the dangerous 'minimum' limit, your world shrinks. Time, always a relative concept, becomes very concentrated and one's perception of importance narrows enormously. I would never wish to repeat the experience, but I can see that the clarity it brings is invaluable. My challenge to myself is not to waste the insight I have been given. My desire is that I can share that experience with others, and help them build the future they want.

Gerard Burke, Programme Director of the BGP, talks passionately about business owners 'building the future they want for their business and themselves'. What future do you want, and what will you do this month to start creating it?

Painless Business News

In case anyone is concerned, I am happy to report that all involved in the above episode are on the road to recovery. I hesitated to use this topic in a newsletter, but then realised that my newsletter is just that – a letter of my news – and this is the most important thing I have experienced in 15 years, so it would be daft not to share it (and I particularly want to share the lesson with all of you).

As you can imagine, these events have meant not a lot has happened at Painless Business since the last newsletter. What has happened is the team of people I have built over the years to support my business have done a sterling job to keep the show on the road. Tracey, Celia, Vicky and Ann have been amazing, as have all those others who are part of my wider team. I now realise that about 15 people have a stake in keeping my little company on the right path, and I couldn't do it without them. My business continues to be more successful than ever, and that seems to coincide with me giving more and more of the work to others. A lesson in there perhaps?!

Book Review

Rather than a book, I will offer a movie review this week. *The Bucket List*, starring Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman, features the top-drawer acting you would expect of such movie greats, but also has a story and a message that we should all consider. The bucket list is a list one makes of the things you want to do before you kick the bucket. As one ticks things off the list, one starts to realise which are most important, and most fulfilling. I would definitely recommend it.

What I wouldn't do is recommend watching it with someone who is only a few days out of ICU. Apparently, kicking buckets is still a sensitive subject for the first couple of weeks. How was I to know?!

Remember my mention of *Yes! 50 secrets from the science of persuasion* in the last newsletter? Another interesting research finding from that book this month. Arizona's Petrified Forest National Park was suffering because visitors were stealing a piece of petrified wood as a souvenir. So they erected a sign saying "Your heritage is being vandalised every day by theft losses of petrified wood of 14 tonnes a year, mostly a small piece at a time." Good to draw attention to the fact, one would think. In the research, areas with no sign at all saw a theft level of 3%. The area with the above sign saw a theft level of 8% - almost triple the control amount! A simple sign asking people not to steal wood saw the theft level fall to under 2%. The lesson? Don't have a poster saying "10% of our clients failed to show for appointments" or the negative social proof theory suggest you will encourage failures to show. Better to say "thanks to the 90% of clients who fulfil their appointments, helping us to serve you better". How does this relate to any messages you are giving at the moment?

Painless Puns

This month's quotes I hope will inspire you to do new things, and consider what's important to you.

Make it a rule of life never to regret and never to look back. Regret is an appalling waste of energy; you can't build on it; it's only good for wallowing in. Katherine Mansfield

I am always doing things I can't do, that's how I get to do them. Pablo Picasso

The White Man knows how to make everything, but he does not know how to distribute it.
Sitting Bull

Last week I saw a young woman, a History student perhaps, at the railway station. Her sweatshirt said "Historians do it for ages". That made me smile, so I hunted down the following via Google:

Anaesthetists do it until you fall asleep.

Lawyers do it on a trial basis.

Mathematicians do it in theory.

Osteopaths do it manipulatively.

Acupuncturists do it with a small – well, you get the idea.

Finally, following a claim on the BBC website I found widespread evidence in the *British Medical Journal*, no less, that shows in several countries around the world that a strike by doctors resulted in a DECREASE in the death rate. Yes, less people going to the doctor's reduces mortality. Go figure.

Final Words

Whether we experience an event like I have this month or not, we can all appreciate that life rushes by and if we're not careful, we miss doing those things we really wanted to, or we miss doing them with those we hoped to share it with. Like a diet, the rest of our lives starts tomorrow so whether business or personal, take some time to think what you want from your life and then, like Picasso, just go and do the things you can't do.

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.