

James Butler's Newsletter #81

Amuse, Inform and Inspire

May 2009

Many readers will know that at the time you received my last newsletter, I was leading a charity trip to South Africa – mainly escorting a group of 22 active supporters of Choko (www.choko.org.uk) to visit the World Vision project we have supported over the last 4 years, with over £40,000 of funding and strong community links.

The name for the World Vision project is Kodumela, which in the local language (Northern Sotho) means "Dig Deeper". This trip was a major event in my life, so one could expect a newsletter or two to be inspired by it – and Dig Deeper seems a good place to start.

Kodumela – Dig Deeper



For context, here is a picture of some of the Choko team standing with the organisers and users of a Special Needs Centre, in the footings of their new building which was funded by Choko. (I'm the bald one holding a teddy bear on the far left). The teddy bear takes some explaining, perhaps in another newsletter!

Mrs Mashumu, the lead organiser of the centre is the embodiment of someone who has dug deeper to provide a drop-in facility for young people, like her own child, who have learning difficulties.

One of the joys of being involved in Choko is the inspiration I get from our friends in South Africa, and those here in the UK. As I put this newsletter together, four lessons emerged that may help you in your life and business:

Dig Deeper into your own resources – in the ten years or so that I have been reading and learning about success, and what makes people achieve their goals in sport, life and business, a recurring factor is that it has never been easy. All of us have obstacles to overcome, setbacks to work round and challenges to confront. The issue is not whether we face them, but whether we can dig deep into our own resources to work through them. Certainly my completion of a marathon four years ago was only achieved because for the last six miles or so I could draw on some inner reserve of determination I didn't know I had. What resources could you draw on, if only you dug deep enough?

Dig Deeper into other resources – inner strength is key, but so is the ability to draw on resources around you. The sum of a team is usually greater than the sum of the parts (except for Newcastle United) – what team do you have around you? That could be work colleagues, friends, family, suppliers, clients, the list is endless. You just have to be open to help, and be prepared to ask. In my experience, people are keen to assist.

Dig Deeper and get below the surface – part of my job with clients is to look below the surface of what they are discussing and see if there are underlying issues that need to be brought out into the open. Not psychological issues (not my job, for sure!), but other things that might be hidden, but affecting things on the surface (internal organisational conflict that is not confronted is a classic). Taking the brave step of digging deeper and looking for more systemic issues, not just surface details, is a big step. And it's not only bad things that hide beneath the surface. When in South Africa, Bev and I saw an elephant digging in a dried up river bed. The river was about 100 yards across, and was as dry as a desert. Suddenly, once several feet below the surface, the elephant flicked up his trunk – and it was full of glistening, cool water!

Dig Deeper and get below the surface (part 2) – when 24 people, some of whom are strangers (and some of whom are just strange!), travel together for ten days interesting things happen with personal and group relationships. What was so good to see was people daring to let people into their circle, and creating deep relationships. When visiting an area of poverty, one sees things that are upsetting or challenging, and by allowing themselves to be vulnerable, my travel companions found a source of support from all around them. By going below the surface in their interactions with each other, they built a bond that was a huge resource when they needed it.

My daily work allows me to see the challenges people face in business – whether their own skills, confidence, energy and insecurities, or the relationships, personalities, challenges and idiosyncrasies of those around them. Experiences like South Africa allow me to see there is hope in almost any situation, and that people can help themselves when given a start. I see this too in the businesses I work with.

If you are facing a challenge, or are about to grasp an opportunity, in your business or life, how can you dig deeper and make the most of what you have?

Painless Business News

In February's newsletter I announced the launch of www.goodnewsblog.org.uk – an attempt by a few people to create a blog that only features good news and is an attempt at an antidote to the bad news dominating the mainstream media. Most of the contributions come from me, so I'd be really grateful if you could have a look at the blog and then suggest some stories for inclusion. In particular, I am looking for small business successes – things like new products, hiring staff, increased sales etc. I am finding them for big businesses, but would love to feature smaller businesses too.

My optimistic self still believes that this recession will be shorter and shallower than many of the predictions, and many businesses are already trading their way out of the tough times. For larger businesses who want to look at their business afresh and really challenge all they do as owner-managers and as a company I would heartily recommend the Business Growth and Development Programme at Cranfield University. This is the leading business programme for ambitious owner-managers and I am proud to be on the team delivering it. They are recruiting now for their September programme – have a look at www.som.cranfield.ac.uk/som/bgp.

Book Review

Whilst relaxing in South Africa after the charity part of the trip was complete, I read *Victoria Cross Heroes* by Michael Ashcroft. Ashcroft is a renowned businessman and Deputy Chair of the Conservative Party, and in his spare time has created a trust that now owns over 140 Victoria Crosses. The book tells the story of each medal – who won it, how and what happened to them afterwards. What a humbling book. If you ever need motivation to dig deeper and find inner bravery, these stories are very likely to provide it.

In a recent copy of Metro, I was stopped in my tracks by a brilliant advert for the campaigning organisation Edge. It featured a young teenager holding a banner with the following statement: "I want to run my own business. But the only thing school lets me run is cross country". I was lucky enough to follow an academic track at school and did reasonably at university, but none of that studying prepared me for running a business (and nor did an A Level in Business Studies, as it happens). I think Edge have a point about providing proper education for our young people, and you may be interested in their website, www.edge.co.uk.

Painless Puns

There can be only one quote to start this section:

Dig Deeper

The people of Kodumela ADP, South Africa

I also liked these two:

Nobody can help everybody, but everybody can help somebody.

Anon

Happiness, like unhappiness, is a proactive choice.

Stephen R Covey

This month, I have a few puns inspired or provided by readers (so blame them).

From Viv: *I bought a pair of camouflage trousers the other day. Trouble is, now I can't find them.*

For Hilary, who helped people with dyslexia before achieving a dream in Cornwall: *Hear about the dyslexic guy who wanted to lose his virginity? He blew all his money in a warehouse.*

Finally, Gill submitted this trio of quotes:

To do is to be

Nietzsche

To be is to do

Kant

Do be do be do

Sinatra

Final Words

Many readers of this newsletter have helped me in recent years with my work with Choko – through personal sponsorship, beer festival advertising, donations of services or just letting me talk about it a lot. I have been able to dig into that support, and help the people in Kodumela in some way as a result. My visit there has inspired me to do yet more, so watch this space.

We all have passions, dreams and causes we are working towards. May I wish you every success in your own endeavours, and please include me on the list of people you celebrate with!

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.