

James Butler's Newsletter #96

Amuse, Inform and Inspire

August 2010

Thanks to all those who responded to last month's issue with tales of woe regarding customer service by car manufacturers. It seems Renault are not alone!

This month, a number of client conversations, and some of my own personal reflections have developed a theme. I am interested in how many of us don't know why we are doing some of the things we do. Like a surly teenager, I've been asking "What's the point?"

What's the point?

Perhaps unlike a surly teenager, this isn't a statement of rebellion, rather it is a search for clarity, focus and purpose. Unlike surly teenagers, most of us have very busy lives, with a lot going on in a day, and competing demands on our time, energy and resources. Do we ever stop to ask what is the point of it all, or what is the point of one part of it?

I don't mean we should stand on the ledge of Clifton Suspension Bridge and ask the question of the kindly constable come to talk us down, but I do think we should ask the question more often in our daily lives. Where is the question relevant?

What's the point of your life? – how can we know whether what we do every day has a point, unless we have the bigger picture of what we want to achieve in life? For some this is guided by spiritual belief, for others it is guided by thought and reflection. For some, they have no idea, and flounder without a rudder on a sea of possible life paths. I've been there. This question is often avoided, precisely because it can be hard to answer. Yet the reward of knowing is the greater as a result. What is your answer?

What's the point of your company? – with some businesses I work with, the most life-changing conversation we have is about the purpose of the business. Why does it exist, what does it want to do, and who does it want to do it for. I am amazed how many businesses don't know. At Painless Business, our purpose is to have every business owner achieving their vision and enjoying their work. A lofty goal, perhaps, but one that makes what we do have a point. What's the business purpose of your business?

What's the point of you in your role? – whether an owner-manager or an employee, I think it is vital for us to know why we need to go to work each day. What does the organisation expect of us, where do we add value? If we don't know, how can we plan activity that adds that value and meets expectation? And if your staff don't know, how can they perform for you, your team or the whole organisation? When you start to get to grips with this for each role in a firm, what people do each day starts to change for the better. That's been my experience. Why are you at work today? What's the point of you being there?

What's the point of the activity you do? – with a clear answer regarding your role, you then have a yardstick against which you can measure each activity. How does what you are doing today contribute to the answers to all the questions above? This last week I have had one or two email exchanges to set up meetings with people. After 5 or 6 emails to agree a time, location and date, we then paused and said "what will be talking about?" We had lost the purpose in all the activity. That seems to happen with many of my tasks – what about yours? As you go into meetings, or pick up the phone to call a client, ask yourself "what's the point?" With luck, you'll derive a desired outcome from the meeting, increasing your chances of it happening.

So, you may ask, how does me writing this newsletter fit into all of this – what’s the point of it? Part of my personal purpose in life, I believe, is to help develop others. My company wants to see people achieving their vision and enjoying their work. Part of my role in Painless Business is to write material that provokes thought and engages our customers and contacts. The newsletter, and hopefully this topic, will get readers thinking about what their vision is and what they need to do to achieve it. Some may call us for help in getting there, others will do it in their own style. Either way, this hour of my life will have had a point.

That puts the pressure on you – think or act differently as a result of reading this, or my existence has no purpose. I’m relying on you!

Painless Business News

For many of our clients, parenthood is part of their purpose in life, alongside working in a business, and that balance is not always easy to achieve. Our second Balancing Baby and Business workshop makes it easier. Here’s what Cordelia, an attendee in May, said last week:

Thank you so much. It really made an enormous difference to how I was feeling. I now feel much more in control of what I do, and I have learnt a lot from my mistakes earlier on. Life has really settled down, but really I think I am so much happier because of all the mechanisms I learnt on the course.

If you want outcomes like that, and are able to attend on 12 October in London (9am to 2pm), call now to book your place – 01491 659073. It will be the best £99 you’ve spent in a while.

Elsewhere at Painless Business, we continue to be grateful for referrals from clients, meaning we get more customers like the ones we have already – which we enjoy. August is such a strange month, with so many people on holiday, but those of us who stick around have been able to keep helping clients achieve their vision. For some that is a major merger and new opportunities, for others that is getting a clear action plan for the next year to grow their business. Whatever it is, we delight in seeing people grow into taking control of their future!

Book Review

My local library van has an eclectic mix of titles, and this month the great surprise was *We Could be Heroes, One Van, Two Blokes and Twelve World Championships* by Ben Dirs and Tom Fordyce. Yes, Ben Dirs IS his name! Some may know the authors from the BBC sports pages, and the book is like their live text sports commentary – a bit blokey and unlikely to rival Shakespeare in literary history, but entertaining and laugh-out-loud funny in places.

Imagine two unlikely heroes, keen to win a world championship before middle age overtakes them. Usain Bolt has the sprinting wrapped up, so their attention turns to some of the more obscure sports – shin kicking, wife carrying, you get the picture.

I loved the book – it is packed with tales of ordinary people doing extraordinary things – whether within the competition or just in organising the competition. A heart warming tale of how people will do almost anything to create a social event, have a few beers and enjoy being with people. That has got to be a good thing!

Painless Puns

As ever, my Inbox supplies a steady stream of inspiring thoughts – here are a few of them:

Your past is not your potential. In any hour you can choose to liberate the future.
Marilyn Ferguson

A good plan today is better than a perfect plan tomorrow.
George S. Patton

We are continually faced by great opportunities brilliantly disguised as insoluble problems.
Lee Iococca

Thanks to Rhona for sending in these puns (and sorry Viv, the Shepherd Spy was too painful to make it in):

1. Dijon vu - the same mustard as before.
2. A hangover is the wrath of grapes.
3. Time flies like an arrow. Fruit flies like a banana.
4. You feel stuck with your debt if you can't budge it.
5. A midget fortune-teller who escapes from prison is a small medium at large.
6. Acupuncture is a jab well done.

I have a good friend who has an excellent business printing calendars (whether for home, school or charity, do have a look at www.thecalendarprinters.com), but I do worry for his future – after all, every calendar's days are numbered. (Think about it!)

Final Words

I hope this issue has given you cause for thought, and you have time in the coming days to reflect on 'what's the point' in your life.

As an aside, I'm thinking of branching into the T-shirt market – I think a T-shirt with "What's the Point?" across the chest would be a good seller – what do you think?

Warmest regards

James Butler

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