

James Butler's Newsletter #100

Amuse, Inform and Inspire

December 2010

The attempt to redress the balance with last month's newsletter must have worked – because Stephen emailed to say "Balance appropriately restored". As Basil Fawlty once said "A satisfied customer – we must have him stuffed."

This issue marks a century of newsletters, and it's Christmas, so it only seems fair to indulge in some nostalgia and a look back at some of the key topics covered since that first tentative missive to about 40 people in September 2002. This issue will be sent to 1699 people (oh, why couldn't one more have subscribed!). When considering possible song titles as a theme, *You Sexy Thing* or *I'm Too Sexy* obviously sprang to mind and *Don't Worry, Be Happy* was a possibility. But if you recall any of the Painless Puns, there was only going to be one winner:

The Only Way is Up

A glance through the archive of newsletters (they are all available for your Christmas entertainment at www.painlessbusiness.com/newsletters) saw some interesting themes emerge, reflecting my personal interests and journey over the last eight years (gosh, I've been self-indulgent!). Here are some of the favourite sources of inspiration, with some hopefully useful thoughts for you:

Anthony Edwards – looking a bit like a Hollywood actor has given opportunity for a couple of topics – Top Gun and ER, of course. The May 2003 issue shared lessons from two real Top Gun instructors I had heard speak – most notably that top fighter pilots plan meticulously and review constantly – so that they continuously improve. ER provides endless opportunities for business lessons, but one that stands out is that a good emergency room has a top-rate triage system, and we could do with that for our work desks – what needs immediate attention, what can wait, and what should be discharged immediately?

Harry Potter – JK Rowling may have revolutionised reading for kids over the last ten years, but she has (accidentally or otherwise) also woven in some interesting philosophical lessons. Dobby was such a popular theme for a newsletter, he appears twice in the archives – along with two issues featuring Death Eaters. Dobby provides an excellent visual image of that voice we often hear in our heads – telling us how doom awaits and we're not good enough. Death Eaters exist in many businesses – those negative people who suck energy from a project, always see the negative and dispirit those around them. Like Harry and his chums, you need to rid your world of Death Eaters.

Charity Work – the last six years have seen the development of a charity I helped found, that supports a community in South Africa. So, themes from that community and the work of the charity have appeared a few times. May last year saw an issue inspired by the community name – Kodumela, which means Dig Deeper in the Northern Sotho language. In times of recession, and other difficulty, we can all learn from digging deeper and finding the resolve to overcome our challenges. Our first Beer Festival in 2008 inspired my favourite title of the last 99 "Beer, so much more than a breakfast drink". The biggest lesson from that first Festival, and the two since, was "Don't be afraid to ask" – when we need help, the biggest challenge is actually asking for assistance. When we do, there is usually a queue of people who want to step up.

Thank You For The Music – most of all, the newsletter topics reflect an eclectic taste in music – from hard rock to The Sound of Music and, perhaps most memorably, including ABBA. A newsletter that spawned a litany of speaking engagements (including one at Cass Business School last month!), those Swedish philosophers have so much to teach us. With

such a rich back catalogue, it is hard to pick one key message, but as we approach Christmas, and perhaps you are reflecting on your past year, this seemed most fitting:

*Voulez-vous
Take it now or leave it
Now is all we get
Nothing promised, no regrets
Voulez-vous
Ain't no big decision
You know what to do
La question c'est voulez-vous
Voulez-vous*

Hopefully, you have no regrets from 2010, and now is your opportunity to consider what you can take or leave in 2011.

So, as you digest your mince pies in the days to come, please consider these lessons from the last 100 issues – what will you stop, start or do differently in 2011 as a result?

- **Plan meticulously, review constantly**
- **Have a triage system for your workload**
- **Silence your Inner Dobby**
- **Expel the Death Eaters from your teams**
- **When faced with adversity, don't give in, dig deeper**
- **When you need it, ask for help.**
- **Take it now or leave it, have no regrets. Voulez-vous?**

Painless Business News

Another possible song title this month could have been *Eight Days a Week* – because it feels like we have that kind of workload! We are toiling on lots of things behind the scenes to improve how we work (trying to walk our talk), we have some fantastic client opportunities (thank you!) in the first half of the year, and we are always looking for more things to do. We feel we have a great team now to really support our clients, we welcome the growth we have seen in 2010, and want more of the same in 2011!

At Painless Business, our stated purpose is to help others in business to love their work and achieve their vision. We really enjoy doing it, we think we're good at it, and we have a track record of seeing clients achieve it. We can't make the world painless overnight, but we can do it one client at a time. If you want more from your work, or feel you don't know your big picture or vision, please call.

Book Review

I was blown away this month by *I Choose to Live* by Sabine Dardenne. Sabine was the infamous victim of a Belgian kidnap at the age of twelve. She was imprisoned and abused, but was discovered and rescued after over 100 days. Her resolve then, and in the years afterwards as she dealt with the emotional scars is just unbelievable. Books like this always make me reflect on the comparatively minor challenges I face. However, as they say in football, you can only play the team in front of you – and Sabine certainly inspired me to make more of my opportunities.

Currently I am reading John Barnes' autobiography. Not a literary great, but interesting to learn his perspective on racism in sport and in society generally.

Painless Puns

After 100 issues, this section is starting to gain some notoriety – someone even said recently that the newsletter “always made them laugh”. Perhaps they didn’t read the puns?

First, some inspiring thoughts as you plan next year:

I’d rather be a failure at something I love than a success at something I hate.
George Burns

There are some people who live in a dream world and there are some who face reality; and there are some who turn one into the other.
Douglas Everett

Now the bit you’ve all been waiting for. Thanks to Stephen who in his reply to last month’s issue about communication cited the quote you hope never to hear:

No-one told ME there was a communication problem.

As I stare out at the sub-zero temperatures and a few inches of snow, Carol’s pun seems appropriate – *one snowman turns to the other and says “Can you smell carrots?”*

Who knows how many jokes these 100 newsletters have included, I have always hoped they would make you laugh. However, I fear that for every ten I sent out, *no pun in ten did.*

As the title says, the only way is up!

Final Words

Thank you to those who have been here since Issue 1 in Sept 2002. Thanks to those who have joined along the way. Thanks to Bev, who has proof-read every single one. Thanks to Celia, Ann, Vicky and Hugh for increasing our capability and reach in the last year or so. Thanks to my mother, without whom all this would not have been possible.

Sorry, watching Sports Personality last night has obviously affected my thinking! Have a fantastic holiday season, and we all wish you a healthy and prosperous 2011.

Warmest regards

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