

James Butler's Newsletter #89

Amuse, Inform and Inspire

January 2010

It has been an interesting month – with many businesses, especially our clients in alternative or complementary healthcare, affected by the disruption caused by the snow. The irony did occur to me that the newsletter last month included the two clichés “careful what you wish for” and “create more white space”. Little did I know that white space in my diary would be created by the white landscape outside!

Whilst on the topic of the last newsletter, thanks to Vanessa, who emailed to say “This is my favourite issue yet”. As she has received all 88 issues, I thought that was nice. Thanks, too, to those who thought it was the worst issue, but chose to keep that to themselves. As always, please do send your comments and feedback – I really appreciate knowing how you react to what I send you.

To Fail to Plan is to Plan to Fail

Notwithstanding one-in-thirty-year snow events, I have found throughout my business life that having a plan for what to do is a fundamental tool for success. I encourage any business owner, and especially clients, to have some sort of plan – for their business and their lives. Just this week I have worked through two business plans with two clients. One was 3 pages, with a target of £2.5 million in revenue. The other was 18 pages, with a target of £250,000. This variety got me thinking about what we need to know to create a good plan.

At Painless Towers, Celia and I are working through our planning for 2010 and beyond – and we now have a 7-8 page document to guide our thinking and our activity. We have a few pages of text, a financial forecast, and then some spreadsheets planning our marketing activity. For us, this is a good plan because we can see what we need to do in the various areas of the business. When I think through how we put it together, I thought there were these key principles to share:

Know where you are – a good plan has to start with an assessment of your current reality – a description of your business, your product, your market. For many who prepare a plan for the first time, this can be some of the most illuminating work. Before you can think of what to do in the future, you need a good case history and diagnosis of the business as it stands now.

Know where you want to go – many businesses seem to amble through life, trying to survive, maybe increasing sales, but with no real direction or ambition. Most of the successful people I have met, in life and business, have had some direction to guide them to success. The other side of this is knowing where you DON'T want to go. So if there are particular market segments or client types that you don't like servicing, have a plan not to.

Know the next few steps – when I ran a marathon 5 years ago, I stood on the start line with no idea what the last four miles would be like (thankfully). I had never run more than 22 miles, but I knew how to do that, so that was what I started out to do. Business success can be like a marathon, just with fewer blisters. You don't need to know exactly how you will finish the task, but you do need to know how to move to the first stage.

Know the resources required – once you have an idea of what you need to do, you need to understand the resources required. These resources can be people, money, systems, suppliers or equipment, and once you know what is required, you can start to plan how to provide them. In most cases, this translates into a monetary forecast of the cost of resources, how those costs relate to revenue, and thus the financial stability of the business.

Know what to do and when to do it – in my experience, plans are easy to create but harder to execute. A key step in executing a plan is to have a clear picture of the timescales for the various actions you are planning. This allows you to manage workloads; arrange suppliers; organise funding; and monitor your success in implementing the plan. Clear milestones, with dates, are an essential part of your business planning.

Know your progress – once you have those milestones, it becomes easier to measure progress, so that you know whether you are progressing at the right rate and in the right direction. Of course, this means you must review your progress periodically (monthly perhaps), and adjust course as necessary. And to review progress, your milestones need to be allied to measurable indicators that will tell you if you are achieving what you intend. Which brings us back to knowing where you are and where you want to go – if these elements are clearly defined and measurable, you can measure travel between the two, and celebrate when you arrive!

- What are your plans for 2010 and beyond?
- What are your next steps?
- What resources do you need to execute your plan successfully?
- How will you measure progress towards your goals?
- How will you celebrate success?

Painless Business News

I recently gave a talk to a group of coaches in Oxfordshire, based on my experience in this business. I enjoyed meeting the group, and it was illuminating for me to reflect on the progress since I started (88 issues of this newsletter ago!). After 8 years, this is easily the longest I have spent doing anything, and with 2009 being my best year ever as a business, it is certainly not something I regret!

I'd like to thank all those friends, clients, colleagues, suppliers and newsletter subscribers who have shared the journey, and I would like to ask how can we bring those years of experience in running a business to bear on your business?

Book Review

Those of you who are connected to me on Linked In (<http://uk.linkedin.com/in/painless>) may have picked up on some of my Christmas reading. *One Red Paperclip* by Kyle MacDonald was a really pleasant find in my local library. A very easy read, it tells the tale of a Canadian who tried to trade up from a paperclip to a house. Read the book to see if he succeeded, but also read the book to hear the life lessons he learnt on the way (or visit his blog oneredpaperclip.blogspot.com). There is something very powerful in his story about the quality of the journey being more important than the destination.

Another element I really liked was the satirical lessons presented at the end of each chapter: gently, or perhaps not-so-gently, mocking the sort of clichéd self-help writing I do!

Something else I have enjoyed this month was sent by a reader, Carol. (Thanks Carol!) Have a look at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42E2fAWM6rA>. Quite brilliant.

Painless Puns

This month sees the 5th birthday of Choko, the charity I am very involved with, and the following quotes were inspired by thoughts about the work Choko does:

The only way to have a friend is to be one. Ralph Waldo Emerson

Here is a test to find whether your mission on earth is finished. If you're alive, it isn't.
Richard Bach

The purpose of life is to matter, to count, to stand for something, to have made some difference.
Leo Rosten

On a little lighter note, some more height-related humour:

Make little things count – teach maths to dwarves.

And a quote that is becoming increasingly relevant to me:

Middle age is when the broadness of the mind and the narrowness of the waist change places.
Anon

Final Words

I cannot emphasise enough how often I have seen good planning lead to great success in life and business. Why not make 2010 the year you develop your plan, and start to make it happen. If you want help with that process, that's what we do for a living!

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.