

James Butler's Newsletter #93

Amuse, Inform and Inspire

May 2010

Last month I mentioned that I had been reading about the Cuban Missile Crisis, and a quote from one of the less well known protagonists has been swirling in my head all month. It sums up something I have written about before – that successful business owners are those that can understand the roles required in their small business, and can ensure the roles are performed by people with the right skills and attributes to do them. And it is very, very rare to find all the attributes in one person.

Let Go to Grow

Firstly, let's get the quote out on the table. This comes from Admiral George Anderson, US Chief of Naval Operations in 1962:

Keep a firm grasp of fundamentals. Leave details to the staff. Go for morale, which is of transcending importance. Don't bellyache and don't worry.

Now, I know that very often our client conversations cover some of the negative consequences of "leaving details to the staff", because not everyone performs as you would hope them to – and if that is going through your head, read on for my thoughts on how to manage it. I am not going to advance the case here for having people to do many of the tasks in building a business, because I have done it many times. Suffice to say two things: working for yourself does not have to mean working by yourself; and amateurs rarely outperform professionals – using good specialists is more likely to create value.

Once you have decided you will have people working with you, what do you need to remember (whether those people are staff, contractors or anyone else)?

At Painless Business we have a mantra about "right values, right model, right people and right systems" – if you get those in your business, we believe success WILL follow (and our job is helping you to find answers in those 4 areas). In practice, what does this mean?

Values – you need to spend time considering what type of business you want to operate, what it will stand for, what it will mean to customers and what outcome you come to work for every day. Only if YOU know this can you possibly expect those who work with you to know. Failure to understand these fundamentals is a common cause of unintended outcomes in the workplace. You HAVE to know where your bus is heading if you're the driver, and all the passengers need to be told.

People – Admiral Anderson headed an organisation that had a clear understanding of what their employees should be like – and the staff were under no illusions either. You should have a clear expectation of what the people you work with should be like (including contractors) and there is no excuse for settling for second best. Everyone should be given the chance to live to your standard (provided you have articulated what they are). If they don't, do they merit a seat on your bus?

Systems – Admiral Anderson had the confidence to leave details to the staff, because the Navy had clear rules of engagement, chains of command and standard operating procedures. Even the Marines had a manual to read. You may not have the resources of the US Navy, but you don't have the scope of operations either. In my experience, simple systems to run a business can be written in an hour or two, and then be refined. The right people, with an understanding of your values and vision and clear systems to guide them can be trusted. Then you don't have to bellyache or worry, and can focus on the fundamental of morale – including your own.

Why do you come into work every day?

What values do you expect people to uphold in your business?

How do your people measure up (staff, associates or contractors)? What do you need to share with them to improve their game?

What new people do you need to find, and what old people need to move on, for you to live up to your values and vision?

What systems need to be in place to support you in building your business? What can be improved?

Painless Business News

Celia and Vicky had a great day with their first **Balancing Baby and Business Workshop** on 10 May in London – with some great feedback from those who attended. More are scheduled for later in the summer, so if you are, or know, a mother who struggles to balance the demands of motherhood and working, please bear these workshops in mind.

Our sister business, Painless Practice, has been totally revamping its website, and we are really pleased with it. This is a classic example of the benefits of letting go – sharing my business with Celia allowed me to ask her to work on project managing the revamp, and delegating most of the hard work to her. Also, we are lucky to have a brilliant professional to redevelop and manage our web presence – and we are indebted to Pam Day at Clarihon. If you ever need some help with web stuff, we would heartily recommend Clarihon. If pushed, we might grudgingly recommend Pam's husband Nigel too. (Yes Nigel, we're only teasing). Have a look at www.painlesspractice.com to see our new online persona.

Book Review

As an incurable optimist, it seemed unlike me to be reading a book entitled "*How the Mighty Fall*", though at 6'4" and carrying more weight than I used to, it could have been a useful manual for post-shiraz instability issues. Actually, it is the latest book from business academic and guru Jim Collins (see *Good to Great* and *Built to Last*, both excellent). Using academic methods, Collins considers some major US brands that have fallen, and compares them to competitors that excelled, to look for lessons for other businesses. There were many, and I would recommend the book to anyone running a business that is either of reasonable size, or has been around a while.

For me, the key learning could be summed up by two quotes from the text:

Circumstances alone do not determine outcomes. [Because companies/people in similar circumstances can fair very differently] *The path to recovery lies first and foremost in returning to sound management practices and rigorous strategic thinking.*

Now all we need is a definition of sound management practices and rigorous strategic thinking!

Painless Puns

Thanks to my ex-boss Phil for a reminder of these great spoof letters from Viz:

Last week I attended an AA meeting, and to my horror, each person present stood up and openly admitted to being an alcoholic. I'm not having these boastful drunkards repairing my car. I can only hope the RAC have more responsible employees. Ian Bell, London

I am married to a Taiwanese lady, and people often ask me if she was a mail-order bride. I find this very insensitive. The Royal Mail loses around 2 million letters and parcels each year, and to suggest that I would trust the delivery of my wife to them is insulting in the extreme. She was sent by DHL next day delivery. L Palmer, London

I was shocked to hear the Home Secretary say that Britain's prison population has been ballooning for the past ten years. My God, has the world gone mad? Those people are there to be punished, not to be given 'thrill of a lifetime' experiences that most law abiding citizens can only dream of. Mrs Close, Leeds

As I 'look forward' to a weekend with my in-laws, it seemed opportune that this quote appeared in my Inbox:

He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how. Friedrich Nietzsche

On a more inspirational note, I also like this one that arrived shortly after:

Mediocrity is a sin. Don't do your bit; do your best. William F. Halsey, Jr.

Well done to Jayne Reddyhoff, who correctly answered last month's quiz. Christopher Marlowe, Josef Stalin, Hans Christian Andersen and Louis Braille were all the sons of cobblers. The Google age reduces the power of trivia quizzes, so it is perhaps fitting that the winner is a Google guru – THE person to talk to about SEO and Adword marketing. A prize is on its way to Jayne, and I suspect a comment linking the content of my newsletter and cobblers is on its way to me from my web man Nigel!

Final Words

My challenge to you this month is to seek ways to let go of roles and task in your practice – and to create the right value and system framework that the right people can excel in. By luck more than judgement, and not without bumps in the road, I seem to have stumbled into that fortunate position myself in the last year – and the team you will see on our new website, as well as the range of contractors we have who help us function, have helped us grow as I have increasingly let go. What I would love is for you to have the same good fortune.

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.

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