



January 2004 Newsletter

Good start: a New Year special that didn't even go out in January. The Boyscout is apoplectic. Anyway, as part of our drive to copy everybody else, this newsletter will explore the expected trends in 2004. A sort of accountant's horoscope?



Whose game theory

I don't know if anybody actually read the November Book of the Month (Straw Dogs). It was pretty gloomy (even for November), although Miss Sparkle seemed impressed. My attention has been drawn to a similar type of book, albeit considerably more positive. Allegedly, the increase in complexity of human society/relationships/business/the global economy (just about everything, in fact) can be explained by game theory. "Zero-

sum" games are those where somebody wins and somebody loses, whereas "non-zero-sum" games can involve both (all) sides winning. Hence, the talk about win-win scenarios. This roughly translates into the observation that it's pointless (stupid?) to humiliate somebody who might be able to help you later. History is a string of non-zero-sum dynamic forces? Please discuss, or visit the website on <http://www.nonzero.org/>

Missing link

Last month's favoured book has got a website associated with it. The one about the convergence of biology, computers and business. Worth a look www.itsalivebook.com

Books of the month

"The Resilience Factor" by Karen Reivich & Andrew Shatte

"Authentic Happiness" by Martin EP Seligman

Let's get 2004 off to an orgy of introspection. The resilience book is hard work and extraordinarily analytical. The happiness book is far more fun. But, they both say approximately the same thing: it's up to you to set your own level of happiness and generally rationalise the crap that the world throws at you.

Try the happiness test on www.authentichappiness.org

The (big) unanswered question is: "Are solicitors naturally miserable (ie not happy), or does the job make them so?" happiness@chrisduckett.co.uk

Inspector holds forth

I knew it was worth reading Taxation magazine. The following diatribe was extracted from a 15 page letter from this particular inspector to Contractor UK, the group fighting the IR35 issue:

"You appear to be the type of accountant who invites my opinion for the express purpose of using it as target practice for the sport this provides and for the further honing up of the logistical skills involved, albeit with a deceptively smooth veneer of diplomatic language. What I gave you, I gave you in my capacity as someone who is not paid on commission, is not paid bonuses for tax bought to the Exchequer's coffers, is not like a get rich quick opportunistic solicitor operating fast and loose on a "no win: no fee" basis in a culture of compensation and insurance against everything." There was a lot more in a similar vein. Chip on both shoulders?

Fetish of the month

The article on jelly babies has drawn so much interest that Rob Simpson has offered a prize for the "fetish of the month". I think he's talking about a bottle of Australian champagne, but you might get a box of apples into the bargain. According to his definition, the prize will go to the fetish that he most envies. Reply, at your peril, to fetish@chrisduckett.co.uk As always, Rob's decision is final.

Miserable accountants (too?)

A recent survey shows that accountants are the most disaffected profession of all with 50% actively looking for a new job at any one time. Or maybe they're permanently on the make? Anyway, the Sage of Bishopswood reckons that happiness is the difference between perceived expectation and reality. Which suggests that accountants are, in fact, optimists? Somehow, I find that hard to believe.

One particularly satisfied client sent me a rash of anti-accountant jokes. Along the lines of "You know your accountant is an extrovert if he stares at your shoes instead of his own".

Apple and innovation

Innovation is the Holy Grail of the business world, yet being innovative is never enough on its own. The best example of this is Apple Computers, inventors of most of the things we now take for granted (such as the mouse). As manufacturers of PCs (the Macintosh), they rank 10th in the world, way behind the copycats, and on a different planet from Microsoft. The lesson from this is:

- Not all innovation is equal
 - Innovate for cash, not cachet
 - Don't hoard your goodies
 - Innovation doesn't create growth: management does
 - Attention deficit has no place here
- <http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/78/jobs.html>

Tricky Dicky on fraud

Those who attended the early Business Development Club meetings will remember Richard Thomas, my old Barclays bank manager, who set up on his own selling presentation equipment (projectors and the like). I was therefore rather surprised to see him staring back at me from the pages of the Times; centre piece on an article on fraud. It appears that he suffers from a constant stream of dodgy bankers drafts and similar scams. However, if he attempts to report an obvious fraud to the police, they simply lack the resources to respond. He's wasting his time. A new task force is being formed – with 18 officers to cover the whole country.

CKO

Chief Knowledge Officer, would you believe?

Rust never sleeps

Corporate America has discovered that dotcom "burnout" has been replaced by "rust-out". Caused by the lack of promotional opportunity or equivalent jobs with other employers. The solution? A stress audit?

BD and sex

On the subject of an innovative ideas that got no further, an American book on using business techniques to get a bloke (for the over 30s) is currently selling well. [The more cynical may deem this to be a charter for the desperate.]

You may remember that we came up with the very same idea in the December 2001 newsletter. The main difference being that we didn't write a book and therefore didn't make lots of money. Our checklist for the "Ideal Man" was as follows:

- Tall and passably good looking (but not vain)
- Able to listen like a woman (and therefore not offer solutions)
- Dependable and exciting? A good accessory, rather like an expensive handbag.
- Always able to decipher (notice) female error messages and react accordingly
- Suitably well behaved in the toilet department.

- "Sexual appetite of a stoat"

Unfortunately (predictably?), in the 2 years since dreaming up this list, no ideal men have been identified.

Revenue recruits 500 'tax credits' staff

The Inland Revenue is recruiting an additional 500 staff to its new call centre in Newcastle in the Spring to safeguard against another tax credits fiasco. Then there's the story of the Finnish taxman who died at his desk and it was two days before his colleagues noticed.

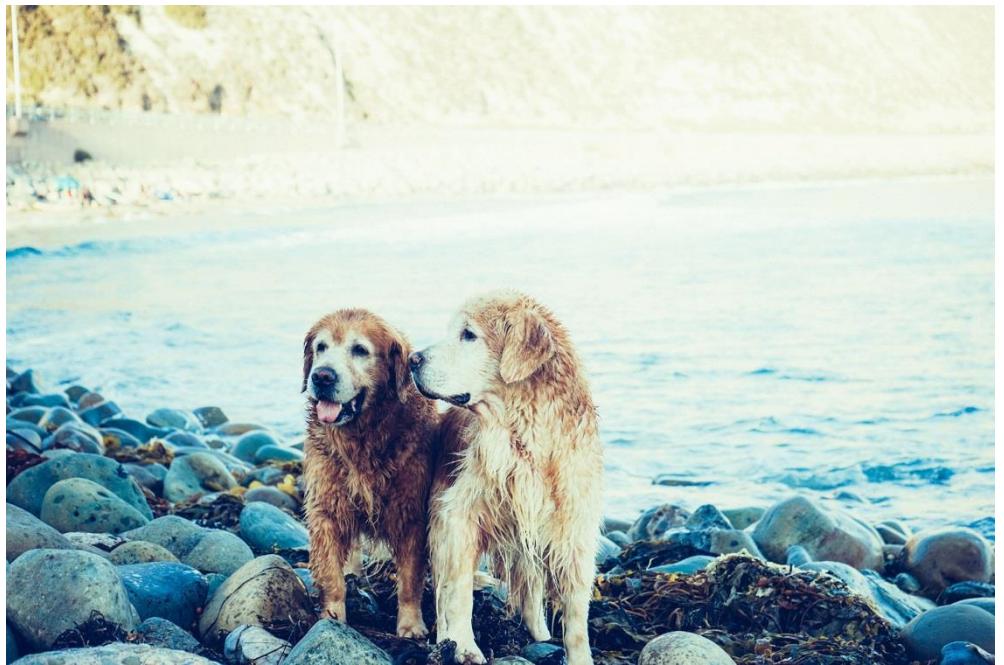
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