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VIEWPOINT

By Carmine Gallo

Networking for the Right Reasons

Keeping in touch with you clients means more than just sending a Christmas card every year.

I ran into my insurance agent at Starbucks the other day. Although we haven't seen each other in a long time, he's not a stranger. Far from it. John Dieroff has a Salinas (CA) practice that he has built by mastering the fundamentals of customer communications. Ninety-five percent of his business comes from his 1,500 existing customers or their referrals. John makes every client feel as though he is more than an insurance agent and a retirement planning specialist – he's a close friend.

I don't expect a holiday card from John. In fact, he purposely avoids them because "everyone does it." Instead he communicates with me and his other clients all year long. Dieroff is in constant contact with us, but not to sell anything – at least not on the face of it.

Two days after our encounter, I received a letter in the mail from him simply saying, "Thanks for saying hello at Starbucks!" I also included an article about the current social-security crisis and how couples should prepare for their retirement.

Dieroff competes against the big guns like Washington Mutual, Wells Fargo, and Morgan Stanley, and yet he enjoys considerable success based on the fact that he connects with his clients on an emotional level.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING. As I was developing this topic, I had the opportunity to interview Keith Terrazzo, author of *Never Eat Alone: And Other Secrets to Success, One Relationship at a Time*.

Like Dieroff, Ferazzi maintains a constant line of communication with his clients all year long. He, too, avoids the traditional card on December, instead using Thanksgiving as the holiday to wish his clients well and to thank them for their business.

MAGIC 250. Although his friends and acquaintances number in the thousands, Ferazzi believes that at the most, people have only enough time to stay really close to 250 people. Ferazzi recommends that business professionals break down the group to the core 50 for monthly communication, the next 100 for several times a year, and the final group for 2-4 touches per year.

HIGHER LEVELS. It's interesting to note that neither of these two successful businessmen contacts his list to sell anything; at least not outright. Dieroff says his goal is to "stimulate their thinking and move them to higher levels of success in their personal

and professional lives.” He’s out to teach people something new. Ferazzi’s goal is never to network for the sake of networking. It’s to build real and lasting relationships – an attitude many business professionals could employ to extend their relationship with customers, clients, and colleagues. The sales will follow.