

On Effort and Holiday Cards

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I've been flooded by electronic holiday cards wishing happy holidays and a prosperous 2023.

But the senders are forgetting one major thing. Effort matters. An electronic holiday card means nothing when it's blasted out of a CRM with no human touch or effort. It's the meaning and effort behind the message that matters. Not the message itself.

I'm not looking for facts. I'm not looking for information. I'm looking for someone who cares enough to craft a note to me personally, even if it's just a few sentences. I'm looking for someone who took time out of their busy day. That time is costly, and therefore, it means a lot.

Here's the bigger lesson: if you want to send something valuable, it needs to have some cost. That may be monetary or it may be time. But expending a cost shows you care.

It's the same thing with rubber-stamped signatures – if you are a leader, sign the damn card/letter/note yourself. And yes, we can tell if your assistant signs it for you. If you are too busy for this simple act, what message does that send? No one's asking for you to write a book, but just make it personal.

Rory Sutherland, author of *Alchemy: The Dark Art and Curious Science of Creating Magic in Brands, Business, and Life*, explains this principle:

If you can't afford to pour money into the paper or the printing of your wedding invitation, you can use another scarce commodity that I'll call 'creativity', although it encompasses a variety of talents: design, artistry, craftsmanship, beauty, photographic talent, humour, musicality or even mischievous bravery. A handmade birthday card can be cheaper and yet still more moving than an expensive bought one – but it has to involve a level of effort... The meaning in these things derives from the consumption of some costly resource – which, if not money, may be talent, or effort, or time or skill or humour...but it has to contain something costly, otherwise it is just noise.

Is this the biggest deal in the world? Of course not, but there's a bigger principle at play. People can sense contrived shortcuts. People know when something doesn't have meaning or was mass produced. People can tell the difference when someone really cares.

What about the argument that e-cards save paper and the environment? That's fine, but then send a unique, personal email that's not from a template or CRM.

If you have clients, you owe it to them to make any touch personal and costly. Make it a phone call. Or a handwritten note. It doesn't have to be elaborate, but it better be personal, otherwise no one will care.

Valuable clients and relationships deserve more than just the cheapest and most efficient outreach.

Not every relationship is equal, therefore the effort should vary. But make sure you are deliberately thinking about your relationship interactions. Otherwise, you'll be wondering why you remain undifferentiated from the rest of the crowd.

Peter Kaufman, CEO of Glenair, summarizes the big idea from his speech, *The Multidisciplinary Approach to Thinking*:

All you have to do, if you want everything in life from everybody else, is first pay attention, listen to them, show them respect, give them meaning, satisfaction, and fulfillment. Convey to them that they matter to you. And show you love them. But you have to go first. And what are you going to get back. Mirrored reciprocation. Right? See how we tie this all together? The world is so damn simple. It's not complicated at all! Every single person on this planet is looking for the same thing. Now why is it that we don't act on these very simple things?