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### **Never Eat Alone**

For those of you looking for a date, I apologize if the title of my post got your hopes up. What the title really refers to is a book on networking titled Never Eat Alone. I would highly recommend the read to anyone who would like to strengthen this part of their game.

There is too much information in the book to convey in a single posting, so I thought I would touch on the basic premise of the book. Essentially, Mr. Ferrazzi believes that, to be truly successful at networking, one has to move beyond the typical after-hours card exchange/rolodex stuffing that so many people believe is how networking is done. Instead, true networking is when you take the time to understand who you are connecting with, then figuring out how you can add value. Stated another way, true networking is finding ways to make others more successful.

After reading Never Eat Alone, I started thinking about how these concepts apply to my world. Particularly, I began to overlay the author's concepts to banking and what differentiates a bank and/or banker in this regard. This self reflection from an industry standpoint provides a stark contrast that many of you may see out there; the difference between true "Bankers" and "salespeople", who just happen to be in the banking industry.

Some might think there is little or no difference between bankers and salespeople. In reality, the difference couldn't be clearer, especially when looking at it through the lens of Never Eat Alone. If you look at a great commercial banker, they will most likely conduct themselves in a manner very similar to Mr. Ferrazzi's philosophy. He or she will take the time to understand what you do and, while doing so, will mentally be making connections between you and one of the many other clients or contacts that the banker has made. From there, the Banker will do their best to make those connections a reality, thus adding value. Salespeople, on the other hand, most often are "rolodex stuffers". They tend to be very nice people, of course, but their whole purpose in life is to meet you, shake your hand, and figure out if you can be sold something within a short period of time. If they determine you don't fit this criterion, they quickly lose interest (you can often even tell in a conversation when this occurs) and will try and move on as soon as possible.

Let me illustrate the point with a simple example. As I was writing this post, a customer (we'll call him Jason) walked into the bank. Jason does a great job helping people find mortgages. Because we are a business centric bank, we are unable to provide home mortgages but often come across customers who could benefit with a new home mortgage. Every time one of our bankers hears the term home mortgage, we probe a little deeper and often find that we can connect Jason and our other customer, thus producing a Win-Win-Win situation for all involved. Jason gets a new customer, our other customer gets a better home mortgage, and The Business Bank has help improve the situation of two valued customers. By digging deeper and understanding those within our network, true mutually beneficial connections can be made. Sometimes no product or service exchange is even necessary. Merely connecting two folks that will benefit from conversation and idea sharing is of great value to the parties involved.

Understanding the dichotomy of Bankers vs. salespeople, it would stand to reason that most businesses looking for, or reevaluating, a bank would look for the Banker rather than the salesperson. After all, a true Banker will add value to a business by being able to make connections that may not have been made otherwise. Unfortunately not all businesses see it this way. In fact, a lot don't see the value of a Banker and it may never occur to them that they are missing out on a very valuable relationship that can help them and their business be more successful. That's okay by Jason, as he now has an advantage over his competitors that opted for the salesperson. Do you have the same advantage?

By Chris Allen, Vice President