

Katrina Deleon



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Giftology by John Ruhlin

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If 'the thank you economy' + 'getting naked' had a very articulate baby, it would be this book. Giftology promises to teach you strategic gifting that cuts through the noise, increases referrals and strengthens retention with your most important clients, employees, and prospects.

Written by John Ruhlin, an Ohio farm boy who went on to become the greatest salesman in Cutco's 68-year history, Ruhlin slices through the traditional corporate gifting mindset and pares down what truly makes a special experience: radical, selfless generosity. The no-strings-attached, unconditional kind of love that isn't necessarily tied to landing a specific deal or with an ulterior motive in mind. Instead, it focuses on how to give (and who to give to) without an agenda through what he calls 'planned randomness.'

Main points of book:

- You would never go to a wedding and engrave YOUR name on a crystal gift for the bride and groom. Why do most companies treat corporate gifts so differently?
- Instead of a gift that is something you would want, give them something THEY want but may never get for themselves. Ruhlin treats employees like his best clients – for example, he has their homes cleaned by a professional housekeeper every other week so they are less stressed when they get to the office!

- The CEO of the company is bombarded with pathetic attempts to grab his or her attention on a daily basis. And in actuality, many times their “ESP” is their family, who they don’t get to see as often as they would like. Ruhlin recommends getting a gift for the spouse / family, or even the kids once you get to that level. He once gifted knives with the husband and wife’s name carved onto luxury Cutco knives, which are used in the gathering place of home. They are not only used often, but his name is brought up every time they are used, and gestures like this keep you top of mind when a connection needs to be made. “Shock and awe” gifts on steroids.

Another important person in the CEO’s life is the Executive Assistant or their right-hand person. They may be called something different at every company but, the person who can make meetings happen is incredibly valuable to build a relationship with, because they are up close and personal with their schedule, passions and routines.

- Everybody does Christmas gifts. ‘Planned randomness’ is budgeted for at the beginning of the year, and involves sprinkling prospects with gifts at unique times of the year where you are more likely to stand out. It can be anything from St. Patrick’s Day to National Pie Day.

- Treat suppliers as referral partners, because they could turn into just that with the right kind of treatment. Do we do anything with some of our favorite vendors / printers who we rely on for consistent results that attribute to our success?

- Price does not make perfect. It’s the ‘thoughtful thought’ that counts. A \$40 leather golf accessory pouch will always beat a \$200 golf club he most likely already has.

- A themed gift ‘series’ for a huge prospect is an interesting concept. For example, he sent an expensive ice cream bowl, then a few weeks later, a luxury ice cream spoon, then finally delivered gallons of local-handmade ice cream to the office with a note saying “thanks for being the cream of the crop...”

- Handmade / local artisan gifts aligned with core values are always a good bet. You never want to buy something they could see on clearance at Target later.

- Gifting is not a one-and-done but a consistent endeavor. For example if they are already a client, he suggests investing 2% of their profit back into the relationship because it usually only makes them increase their return the following years.

Gravitational Marketing—especially the ESP and Media Team—is already way ahead of the gifting game when it comes to special holidays and important milestones, with thoughtful gestures to keep clients and reps feeling the love throughout the year. I read this mostly to see how we could emulate this strategy and mindset for business development and new referral partners. What can we do to catch the right person’s attention and foster genuine relationships at an accelerated pace?

I am incredibly impatient, so I was not liking his stance that these things take time and are a slow build. I think as long as you are paying attention to what the person likes you can somewhat fast-pace by giving value first, as least breaking down the barrier to the introduction, then you can work toward the planned randomness once they are in your world of prospecting.

My absolute most favorite part of this book:

The best time to send a gift? When you DON'T make the deal. Along the lines of the Intergalactic Rule of Marketing, 'giving value first' is something we are experimenting with content marketing wise for our partner prospects and believe it will result in opening doors to more authentic relationships that will be more forthcoming with their client/member referrals and connections. I know the media team made the killer "we want you back" music video for recently lost media reps too--what else can we do to step up this effort?



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