

Annmarie's 9 Habits of Highly Efficient (or Productive) People

My sister shared an article on the "8 Habits of Highly Productive People" on her Facebook page. Knowing I am an efficient and productive person, she asked if I would be blogging on the topic. The article offers some good advice, but my tips are different and arguably better.

Here they are:

1. Sleep. The experts say that most of us need 7.5 to 8.5 hours of sleep per night. I generally need about 7 to 9 hours regularly. Without adequate sleep, it's hard for me to concentrate. I also find myself over caffeinating or craving unhealthy carbohydrates.

Besides, going without sleep lowers your attention span and immune system — definite productivity killers. Neglecting adequate sleep can lead to cancer and heart disease, researchers say, definitely affecting future productivity.

2. Exercise. It boosts your immune system, heightens attention span and provides an energy boost

3. Purge. The more you have, the more you have to manage. Make it a point to spend some time each week to go through your office. Delete old emails and old versions of files. Get rid of paper copies of stuff you already have on your computer, which, of course, is backed up regularly.

And all that stuff around your house? You don't need most of it. *Parade* just published a good article on this topic.

4. Watch less TV. I'm too busy for television and so are you. You have a life, live it. Most stuff produced by Hollywood nowadays is soul killing anyway. I regularly watch American Idol with my daughters. That's it.

5. Limit web surfing. It is so easy to web surf like mindlessly turning television channels. If you find yourself diverting from your computer tasks because of the web, schedule yourself time to just surf.

6. Maintain a list of priorities by day, week and month. Schedule small tasks that you never seem to get around to that are important.

7. Remove distraction. I use a kitchen timer and close myself off to the rest of the world for a given period to remain focused.

8. Break the procrastination habit. Procrastination presumes that there will always be time to get something done, which creates time debt. This is a faulty assumption given that you don't know the future. When you are not motivated to do something, force yourself to spend 30 minutes just getting started. If you are like me, you will into the task and are likely finish it.

9. Medicate. Most of us do with this caffeine, but too much interrupts sleep. One company I wrote about tracked the lost productivity from allergies and found that employees who take allergy medication are more productive. Do you get depressed a lot? Seek help and consider life-style changes before medicating. Chronic pain is also hard on the body and mind.

Don't ignore your body! See a doctor to see if you have an underlying condition.

Annmarie's Five Favorite Business Books

Winning by Jack Welch. Straightforward and gutsy, Welch tells it like it is and encourages readers to do the same. Written for managers and employees, Welch's advice is clear and even inspiring. "Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others." Welch's book demonstrates how to make that happen.

Guerrilla Marketing by Jay Conrad Levinson. Effectively marketing your business does not have to be costly. Since I share that philosophy, I recommend this book to my clients. Be forewarned, however: The book offers so many good ideas that it is easy to become overwhelmed. Pick out a few, see what's effective, and try more, Levinson advises. I have also read some of the spin-off books, which do not compare to the original.

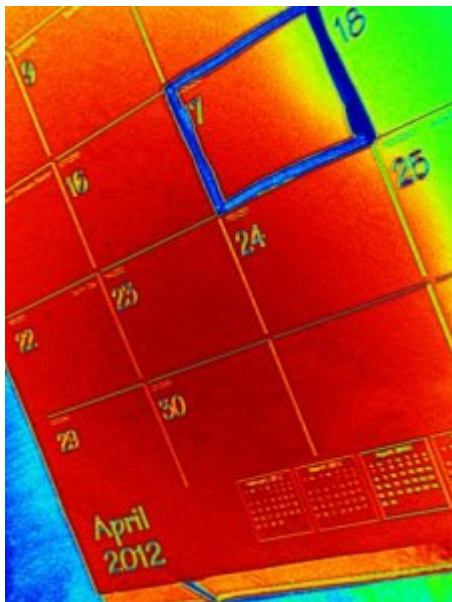
Blue Ocean Strategy by W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne. The authors urge readers to re-think the competitive landscape (red oceans) in their industries to create a blue ocean that makes the competition irrelevant. Sounds good in theory, and there is a lot of it, but it does offer excellent strategic guidance that promotes out-of-the-box thinking.

Boundaries by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend. This is not a business book. It is a book about relationships. But since so much business dysfunction results from a lack of interpersonal boundaries, this is an important book. Unfortunately marketed to a religious audience, this book contains biblical references that might put off other audiences. The book, however, is far more about psychology.

Principle-Centered Leadership by Stephen Covey. The sage who also gave us the "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" demonstrates that being moral and highly principled in business is not only the right thing to do, but it is just good for business. Published during the business era of Tom Peters', "In Search of Excellence," Covey's work has better stood the test of time. While I agree the world needs more morally and ethnically principled individuals, the committed Mormon's likely belief that he is preparing to be the god of his own planet should be kept in mind. We already have enough would-be gods in business and politics.

Kudos to Turbo Tax (and My Tax Tips from the Trenches)

Benjamin Franklin said that the only two sure things in life are death and taxes. It is also certain that for most people, preparing taxes are complicated.



Taxes are due April 17, 2012!

As I wrote in a previous blog, **customer empathy** (<http://wp.me/p25Cue-B>) is key in attracting and retaining clients. My most recent experience with TurboTax (<http://turbotax.intuit.com>) demonstrates such impressive customer empathy that I am compelled to share it. (Wouldn't you like your customers to do that as well?)

Most of us dread doing taxes amid the looming Fear of Audit that pervades the complicated process. Many hire professionals to avoid the hassle. But by the time I collect and organize the documents, the work is already half done.

Enter TurboTax. To benefit the most from this tax preparation software, you should become intimately acquainted with how your circumstances affect your taxes. Thanks to a helpful representative from the Internal Revenue Service, I qualified for an additional deduction and a credit. Confusing wording in TurboTax's "interview" questions, however, made entering this information impossible.

God was smiling on me when Sharon W. answered my call. Past TurboTax customer service reps were unable to help me with this question so I tried calling again. Empathetic and understanding, Sharon W. did not give up until she could help. After reaffirming my qualifications, she patiently walked me through the "interview questions" to satisfy the software. She was empathetic and understanding of my situation. With her help, I saved \$500.

Together, we shared the rush of triumphant excitement as I hit the "file" button.

I had two other problems and she was about to get off work. I had finally found someone very helpful and I did not want to be thrown into the general call center. So she offered to call me the next day.

And she kept her word! On the second call, she helped save me additional \$800! Together, we shared the rush of triumphant excitement as I hit the "file" button.

Producing easy-to-understand tax content to a consumer audience is not easy, and TurboTax

generally does this well. Providing such a consistent level of excellent customer service is not easy either. TurboTax would do well to use Sharon W as a model. I hope she someday sees this post. And no, this is not a paid endorsement.

And while I am not a tax expert, here are a few tips from the trenches:

- 1) **Know what is deductible.** It's painful to discover deductions you missed. I know. I amended my 2010 taxes.
 - 2) **Keep good records.** Keep track of every possible deduction. Since I pay for my own health insurance, I spend enough on medical expenses to get a tax deduction. I also faithfully track all my family's medical expenses, including mileage for doctor visits, parking, co-payments and deductibles.
 - 3) **Develop spreadsheets for next year's deductions by specific tax questions.** My spreadsheets for business and medical expenses are broken down by exact information the tax forms ask. My spreadsheet features business categories that include telephone bills, supplies, hardware, marketing and training.
 - 4) **Do not procrastinate.** I generally don't, but this year I had so much client work I didn't realize until March I was missing a 1099 form. Track expenses as they come so you don't forget anything.
 - 5) **Begin doing taxes after collecting all the paperwork necessary.** TurboTax is, however, is great about picking up where you left off.
 - 6) **Be persistent and insistent on receiving true customer service.**
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Learning to Love My New Macintosh Computer

My friends with Macintosh computers are in love. But I am not there yet.

Saddled with a dying, virus-weakened PC, I took the plunge and purchased an iMac in December. Love often begins with attraction. I was drawn in by the huge screen, its promise of easier graphic design and multitasking. How could I resist the hope of living in a virus-free world even temporarily, knowing that someday evil forces will crack the Mac, and innocence will be lost.

 With assurances that conversion from the PC to the Mac, including data transfer, would be easy, I took home my first Mac. Data transfer, however, was not easy.

Once I figured out that the "command" key is the equivalent of the "control" key on a PC, I started making the Mac my primary computer. But then there was also the optional Magic Trackpad to get used to. The mouse replacement is a flat pad with its own sign language. It requires me to learn to use one, two, three or four fingers depending on how I want it to move within a document and among other open windows.

It is kinda cool, as all Mac products have that “cool” factor to them. But I still have not mastered it, so I cannot report the “Wow” factor as of yet. The track pad also requires me to click a bit harder, which has aggravated a right wrist already weary of two-plus decades of mouse clicking. Benefitting the most from the Mac requires a complete conversion to its world. I don’t have an iPhone. While my carrier now carries the phone, I am contract-locked. So, I will have to wait to fall in love with the symbiotic connection between my computer and phone. Let’s not forget the iPad. Living without one in today’s world is a miracle in and of itself!

My delicious 27” window to the world became a brick wall once I asked my iMac to fulfill the demands of my PC. But how could it, when there are still many PC programs not Mac ready? Mac does offer new applications for free or at little expense. Some programs are less expensive than those I bought for the PC, but the prospect of replacing everything at once is daunting and costly. It took me years to replace my cassette tapes with CDs.

For the \$2,000 I paid, it would have been nice to actually get a book that explained everything, including how to use it and what it can do. But those of us who still like to read on paper are outmoded. Instead I bought a book from an independent author.

My delicious 27” window to the world became a brick wall once I asked my iMac to fulfill the demands of my PC.

I did finally attend a free class at the Mac store. The trainers, young enough to be the children of the three attendees, were friendly and helpful. They are as comfortable in front of computer screens as I am with books and paper.

They encouraged me to experiment and go online to get specific questions answered. “Oh, sure,” I thought. “I have plenty of time to play on my computer amid raising my children, keeping house and running a business. No problem!”

I am still waiting to fall in love with my Mac. I am hopeful that I will. In the meantime, I use both computers.

If you are considering making the conversion to the Mac, my advice is to prepare. Clear off your schedule so you can spend a lot of time getting to know it.

When my schedule clears, I am going on vacation!

Washington D.C.’s Cherry Blossoms on My Mind

Washington D.C. is being enveloped in nature’s simple beauty.

Pinkish white canopies of cherry blossoms gently sprinkle to a white carpet of wonder. The buds

have peaked earlier than usual this year in Washington, D.C., blooming with the promise of spring.

Dark-suited power brokers, dreamy couples, stroller-pushing mothers, tourists and joggers...are all awestruck. And, we all stop, even for a moment, for the welcome respite from the pressures of relentless traffic, unforgiving deadlines and endless meetings. We have to. For this moment does not last long. The peak is a moving target of about three days amid the randomness of March through April with an average ETA of April 4th.

Fully blooming blossoms unfold spring's hope of new beginnings.

The blossoms faithfully appear every year, but too often, weather is not in sync with nature. The fickleness of spring sometimes robs us of these delicate treasures. This is my 16th full spring in Washington. And more than once, I have seen freezing rain rip blossom and branch and strong winds dissipate the splendor.

It seems Washington has only about 40 truly nice and comfortable days each year. Even as they bloom, the days can be cold, wet and cloudy. You can catch the cherry blossoms before and after peak, but the scene is not quite as majestic.

Washington is generally more out of sync than weather and nature. In this town of conflict, we cannot even agree on why weather appears to be getting more out of sync. In this town of power, we lack the power to create the moment when nature and weather merge in ultimate beauty.

As we wait, Congress debates the nation's fate. Value-conflicted Washington mothers watch how their children play. Budget battles ensue from the kitchen table to the White House.

But there is something magical about those cherry blossoms.

Then the perfect moment comes. Fully blooming blossoms unfold spring's hope of new beginnings. As we share nature's beauty, there is a wonderful, quiet moment, when Washington stands still. We are reminded that there is something bigger than day-to-day hassles and clashes of destiny. And we are all a part of it.

And today, without a media campaign or pomp and circumstance, the sun did arrive. And in that moment, Washington shines its brightest.



Business Lessons Learned from My Diabetic Daughter

Yesterday marked six years since my daughter was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes. She was nearly four years old. Also known as Type 1 diabetes, her condition means her pancreas does not make insulin, which is necessary to process food. She will be 10 years old next week and I have learned many lessons that translate to business as well.

Lesson 1: Be prepared for the unimaginable. I will never forget taking my daughter to the emergency room and being told she had diabetes. Businesses should have contingency plans for everything from a flooded office basement to sudden health changes for key employees. Never underestimate the importance of comprehensive risk management.

Lesson 2: Constantly monitor your operations. Kristen checks her blood eight to 12 times a day. To stay in range, she gets insulin, food or water to keep her blood sugar in healthy range. Make it a point to track your customers and their changing needs. Employ social media to stay connected.

Lesson 3: Do not allow setbacks to hold you back. Taking a cue from the quick return-to-work philosophy from workers' compensation, I asked the preschool to take her back as soon as possible so she could maintain normalcy. The preschool was wonderfully accommodating. She leads as normal a life as possible despite her disability. Whether it is losing a big client, a key employee or any other setback, do not give up. To be successful, ride the waves of change.

In business, it takes courage to stand out and tell clients bad news they might not want to hear, but true integrity generates courage.

Lesson 4: Be flexible to keep your priorities. In the early years, when Kristen's blood sugar was too high or low, I ran to her preschool to get her back in check. Once I getting my hair highlighted with foil wraps and had to quickly get to her preschool. I told the children I was pretending to be a space alien! My dedication to my daughter took higher priority than my vanity or comfort. Your clients deserve the same attention, but family comes first.

Lesson 5: Be brave. Now that Kristen is older, she faces the ignorance that I once was able to shield her from. She has learned to bravely be who she is and not to be defined by her condition. In business, it takes courage to stand out and tell clients bad news they might not want to hear, but true integrity generates courage.

Lesson 6: Make sure you have the tools you need. She never leaves the house without a blood meter and emergency kit. From computer problems to producing for different clients with similar deadlines, business emergencies can happen. Keep on top of the small stuff that is easy to procrastinate – such as maintaining a clutter-free desktop, invoicing or answering emails – so you are always ready.

Lesson 7: Invest in technology. I pushed hard to get Kristen off syringes and onto an insulin pump as soon as possible. Fight the natural inclination to settle into the technology you already

know. Invest time to master new technology. Recently, I purchased a Mac. It is taking time to learn how it works differently from my PC, but it is worth it. I am still learning to master WordPress, which supports my blog.

Lesson 8: Keep investing in the future. Kristen risks several health problems later in life, especially if she does not consistently take care of herself. With the worst economic climate since the Great Depression, it is easy to fear that businesses will not enjoy the success of the past. Keep investing in your future career and business. Be clear on your market and their its needs and keep pursuing. You cannot reap without faithfully sowing.

Lesson 9: Maintain your physical and mental health. The relationship between health and productivity is irrefutable. Exercise, be mindful of your diet and re-charge with down time.

Have a great week!

Welcome to My New Blog Home

To start off the New Year, I moved my blog to Word Press from Blogspot. It's a work in progress so please think of my new blog location as a new office. You are welcome to pull up a chair, but there are still boxes, papers and other materials that need a proper home in the new space.

There were several reasons for the move. Since many of you are thinking about starting a blog, I am sharing my experience from the trenches.

For starters, Blogspot, which is owned by Google, actually owned my content. I moved it to Word Press because I want to own my content.

Secondly, I wanted to have more layout and design options than Blogspot could offer. I am still learning about my new blog space and where items should go and the advantages and limitations of the new space.

Finally, I wanted to reach a broader audience. Having a blog on Blogspot is like having an office in the basement of another business. This made it difficult for people to find my hanging shingle in cyberspace. Moving to Word Press is like getting closer to Main Street without paying more rent.

It's already paying off. Since moving all my blogs over last week, I am already getting comments on my workers' compensation article.

Moving my blogs over to Word Press was not a matter of pressing a magic import button. It involved a lot of cutting and pasting.

**Moving to Word Press is like getting closer to Main Street
without paying more rent.**

By the way, I am grateful that Blogspot exists. Frankly, I was intimidated about starting a blog. My

brother Dan set it up for me so that all I had to do was change the layout and start writing. Blogspot is pretty much plug-and-play, so for those who want a quick, easy and personal blog, it is still a good option.

For business use, however, I recommend Word Press or similar programs.

Before you jump into blogging, here are some tips to get off to a good start.

- Schedule future blogs. Have about a month of blogs written in advance so you are not writing at the last minute.
- Post blogs regularly. My readers can depend on seeing a blog from me every Tuesday.
- Be personal.
- Write about topics of interest to current and prospective clients.
- Advertise your blog on LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter.
- If you have difficulty coming up with topics or hate writing, hire a professional writer who understands your marketing goals.

Meanwhile, my physical office is also changing. Since I am adventurous, I also purchased an Apple last week. I am trying to adapt to its world – one I haven't been part of for more than 20 years! Switching computers and blog space in the same couple of days was not easy, but sometimes you find yourself so ready for a change that the adrenaline rush sees you through.

Finally, if you are new to my blog, please check out the older posts and become a follower. To learn about me, please check out the "Who Am I? How Did I Get Here?" post. If you want to reach me directly, my email address is Annmarie@lipoldcommunications.com.

I have some really cool future blogs on tap for 2012. They include my vision for workers' compensation in the 21st century, how to write business and marketing plans, and interviews with some of the most fascinating professionals I know.

Thanks for pardoning the dust!

Concerning Customer Empathy:

Too Often, Decision Makers Forget How They Feel When They are Customers

The other day I called the pediatrician's office to schedule flu shots for my children

"I would like to schedule an appointment. Which slots are available?" I asked.

She offered, "If you visit our website, you can see the slots and select your time."

"Yes," I said, "But since we are already on the phone, and your computer shows the available slots, can't I just make an appointment?"

"Oh," she said with slight surprise. "OK..."

We have all been on the other side of frustrating customer service. We have seen the marketing material that does not show why we would be fools **not** to plunk down our hard-earned cash for the latest and greatest product or service.

Why does this happen? The trouble is business folks are so convinced that their product is a must-have that they forget to show that to the customer. I've seen clients list products and services on their marketing material assuming the customers are so educated they already know their need. The irony is so many professionals, who are customers themselves, lack empathy when trying to

attract, retain and service their customers. Customer empathy considers the needs and desires of the customer to bridge the gap between what you are offering and why they need it.

Don't assume your customers know about *why* your service or product is the best. Prove it.

Relationship experts say that in our narcissistic society, we are less empathetic to others. But with a recession with no end in sight, and people working harder to have less, businesses have to do their diligence to assure they understand their customers.

Customer empathy is also critical for effective social media since it requires a more relational approach to communicating with customers.

Knowing your audience is the number one command in journalism. It dictates the information to be presented in a story. The same is true when trying to reach your audience of customers. Don't assume your customers know about *why* your service or product is the best. Prove it.

Imagine sitting at the desk of the person you are trying to reach and asking questions like: What is this person worried about? What are the toughest challenges they face? Who are their customers? What do they need? These are known in the business as "pain points," a term some expert came up with that gives me images of acupuncture.

Disney World does not cut corners when it comes to knowing their customers. When I took my girls there last summer, I was in awe that everything was in place to make our experience wonderful. (My dream really did come true!) Target is another example. Because the store understands my needs, often I can't leave without dropping \$200!

As for the pediatrician's office, I will scroll through multiple screens to sign in, even when doing so on a piece of paper is easier for me. But what do I know? I'm just the customer.

Posted by Annmarie Geddes Baribeau at 9:50 AM 0 comments

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Why Eminence Building is a Must

So you're reading an article or web surfing. You notice a competitor being quoted or published and wonder who did and made him or her the big expert. After all, you know at least as much as that bozo does.

You wonder why your name or firm does not come up higher on web searches like your competitors do.

The biggest reason, chances are, is because they have been **building eminence** for their brand while you wait around being discovered. “Oh,” you say, “I am not one to toot my own horn.”

Well, if you are not going to do it, who will?

Thanks to the Internet, for better or worse, what comes up on a search engine when someone types in your name gives people an impression of you. Googling someone is now second nature for finding potential employees or learning more about them, screening suitable mates and discovering sometimes amazing personal information people actually volunteer to the world.

With eminence building, you and your reputation are in the driver’s seat. For it is you (with a little help) who can position yourself as important, influential or distinguished.

Building eminence means learning the secrets of publishing. Really, what is the Internet but an endless publishing vehicle?

I have published more than 500 articles over than two decades under my name and hundreds of pages on behalf of others. I know how publishing works. I know why a piece is published and why hundreds of queries end up in the recycle bin.

I guide clients to write meaningful content written in a journalistic style that busy editors find irresistible. That’s because I honor editors by knowing and understanding their needs and sending them quality content free of propaganda. Material is presented pre-edited in journalistic style to increase chances of publishing.

I usually start with the trade press because material picked up by another source has higher credibility. Either way, the material can be re-purposed for print and electronic media on the web, in newsletters, blogs and more!

As a result, my clients have successfully attracted and retained clients. They continue to reap the benefits of material published nearly a decade ago. They are often seen at seminars or quoted in the trade press and have made hundreds of thousands of dollars as a direct result of our efforts.

And, believe it or not, my approach is much less expensive than advertising — and it gets better and more meaningful results.

***Thanks to the Internet, for better or worse,
search engine results associated
with your name gives people an impression of you.***

How to build eminence? For starters, consider your audience. Consider their pain points, which I discussed in my blog dated October 25, 2010. Contemplate how your expertise can rock their worlds. Then offer them your brilliance: expertise, innovative ideas and/or solutions in the written word.

Yes, this approach can take a lot of work and time, but the benefits of producing awesome content is worth the investment. Here are my top 10 reasons to build eminence with publishing (with apologies to David Letterman):

- 1) Having something to talk about during cocktail hour.
- 2) Making your mother proud.

- 3) Fine-tuning your critical thinking and communications skills.
 - 4) Justifying your existence to maintain employment.
 - 5) Gaining credibility as a thought leader and/or expert.
 - 6) Getting more “hits” on search engines.
 - 7) Garnering speaking engagements.
 - 8) Helping your kids, or that person you want to impress, think you are famous, important and deserving of respect.
 - 9) Being highly regarded by potential clients, management and colleagues.
 - 10) Providing your co-workers with something to tease you about.
- Got a question or need a solution? Write me at annnmarie@lipoldcommunications.com.
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Why I Never Miss Election Day

The following is an editorial I wrote during my freshman year at Ohio University when I was a staff writer for The Post, Ohio University's independent student newspaper. I wrote this during the Cold War, just before President Ronald Reagan challenged Mikhail Gorbachev, the last leader of the Soviet Union, to tear down the Berlin Wall.

I hope you enjoy this and that it encourages you to vote.-Annmarie

Headline: Maybe Next Year

By Annmarie L. Geddes, Staff Writer

I wanted to vote.

Really, I did.

Ever since I was old enough to know the difference between a Democrat and a Republican, daddy would peer up at me as he cut his steak and say, “It’s your American right. It’s what sets us apart from the communists.”

Wonderful.

So here I am, 18; legally old enough to vote. I registered. I was psyched. I studied the issues, decided on my candidates, and walked into Nelson Commons. I was ready.

I proudly proclaimed my name, expecting verification.

I didn't get it.

"What's your name again?" "Annmarie Geddes," I told her. I could not believe this was happening to me. "I don't see your name Miss Geddes," she said.

I stood there as three people went through files and register cards. But no dice. She smiled and asked me to come back.

Well, I wanted to vote, so I came back.

They remembered me this time. "Would it make you feel any better if I told you you're not the only one?" some guy asked me.

"No," I told him, "I want to vote."

"Well, if you are not registered, you can't."

"But I did register." I said.

"Where?"

"In front of Bentley (Hall), on the way to my political science class."

There was silence. The lady appeared apologetic, "I'll call the board of elections and see what we can do. I am sorry, but that's all we can do." I walked away disappointed.

See, I know the importance of voting. Not because of the "See how your vote counts, Andrew (Johnson) missed impeachment by one vote" propaganda. But back home, I worked in city government. I have even helped with campaigning. I should have had the right to vote because I took time investigating the issues.

So now I am supposed to wait for a letter from the board of elections. But the election is over. I suppose they will let me vote twice next year.

Maybe that's not so bad because that way I can vote on both sides. And my voice won't count.

Just like this year.