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## ***Six degrees of separation***

By Paperitalo Staff

A number of years ago, the concept was around that went like this--there are only six people (or was it five?) between you and anyone else. In other words, if you were given a name of an individual you did not know, through about five or six other people, you could find a connection to them. Recently, I read that Facebook has dropped this to 4.6. Who knows how it is calculated, you get the idea.

Nevertheless, recently this was brought home to me again--twice-in two unrelated cases within one week. The situations are ongoing and I cannot expound on them, but they serve the purpose of cautioning you to remember to not burn any bridges--these can come back to haunt you in the most unexpected places. It is also worth saying, this is a "do as I say, not as I do" admonishment. I have violated this principle numerous times as I have tried to stir up this industry--but I have taken this on as my job.

I can relate a real life example that occurred over three decades ago. At the time, I had a small consulting business and I had placed an individual as a contractor in a certain facility. After a few weeks, this facility decided to hire this person. Said individual called me up one evening and basically told me, "thanks for nothing, I am going to work for the company where you placed me." I was too young and naïve to have had a contract that required them to pay me a fee if they hired my employee so that was that, my invoice printer stopped spinning in that particular case. About a year later, I needed a job, and it so happened I went to work at that same company, in the same department. At the start, my former employee did not work for me, but worked in close proximity to me. However, in about six months, due to some circumstances none of us could have seen ahead of time, that very individual became one of my direct reports. Now, I could have reacted a number of ways to this "opportunity" had I wanted to do so. However, I chose to ignore it and I hope that person to this day would say I always treated them professionally when they worked for me.

It is particularly important to remember this principle (of not burning a bridge) in our industry. It is a large asset industry, but it really involves a small number of players, enough that you can know virtually all of them. If you narrow the idea further, to say project engineers or lab managers or operations managers, it becomes even a smaller universe. While it is important to stand up for your principles and what you believe in, it is equally important to be known for having a professional and honorable reputation.

OK, let's test this theory. I have gone back to one of my business card files and pulled out a card that is around thirty years old. I probably met this person once, and it was in our industry. So if you can figure out who "Jack D. Guthrie" worked for in the early 1980's and give us an update on him, please do so.

For safety this week, we don't need six degrees of separation from our safety principles nor our safety gear. Keep both close at hand.

Be safe and we will talk next week. ##