

Your Guide to Holiday Gift Giving

By D.L. Perkins

Holiday gift giving has become almost obligatory in our society, but it really is a wonderful custom. We give to express our appreciation and build goodwill among our friends, relatives, customers and associates. If you don't see it this way, maybe you could learn to see it in a more positive light.

True, our crowded world can be cold and cruel, but every human being has a basic need to be appreciated. As Aristotle said, people are social beings.

So take the tradition of holiday giving as a joyous opportunity to genuinely show your appreciation. Do so by approaching it with care and sensitivity.

Avoid the Blunder. To avoid giving a gift that could be misunderstood or become an ethical blunder, do your homework. For example, many larger companies have strict policies on giving and receiving gifts. Companies discourage vendors from giving gifts for fear they could create an unfair advantage for one vendor over another. Be sensitive to this. Call the company's human resources department to inquire about the company's gift policies. By doing so, you eliminate embarrassment of the giver or the receiver by staying within the boundaries of company policy.

Think Before You Give. Gifts should be appropriate and thoughtful, but not too personal. Whether gifts are expensive or not is less important than the thought that goes into selecting them. Gifts should be matched to the recipients. For example, avoid giving liquor to everyone on the holiday business list because not everyone drinks. Even more basic is to consider whether the recipient is Christian, celebrates Christmas, etc. Call it a holiday gift? Here are some additional suggestions:

- Avoid gifts with sexual or racial overtones.
- Consider cultural sensitivities.
- Choose different gifts for different clients and coworkers (instead of giving everyone on your list the same item).
- Generally, companies will not bristle at gifts from vendors of small consumables that cost less than \$25.
- If you give a gift that contains your company logo, it should be of high quality. Avoid putting your logo on anything that does not reflect well on your company.
- Consider a charitable gift in the name of your customer's company. Charitable contributions to the American Heart Association, Boys and Girls

Clubs of America, Make a Wish Foundation and others show philanthropic concern while honoring your client.

Gifts from Employees to Employers. Typically, employees do not give gifts to the boss. A personal assistant might give a gift to the boss as a gesture of appreciation. The gift should not be extravagant. Though quality is important, employees should not spend beyond their means—or feel pressure to do so. A nice card or letter of gratitude and good wishes is considered appropriate and all that you, the business owner, should expect. Other gestures for an employee toward a superior might be homemade goodies, cookies or breads that can be shared with others.

Presentation of the Gift. The wrapping, presentation and handwritten enclosure card are as important as the gift. The gift should be neatly wrapped (or, if this is not practical, adorned with a bow or other festive flair), presented in person, if possible, accompanied by a personalized card. A gift worth giving is a gift worth presenting well.

Holiday Cards. A personalized holiday card is sufficient and appropriate in most cases. Be sure that it is of good quality and preprinted with your company name and logo. Sign each card personally and, if possible, add a few words of thanks or holiday wishes. The recipient will appreciate the personalized touch.

Remember, business may be about sales and money, but real people occupy those workstations and cubicles and offices. Show them respect and care. ❖

Jana Christian provided her expertise for this article. She is president of the Etiquette School of Oklahoma. You can reach her at www.OKetiquette.com

Gifts That Never Should Be Given in Business

- Anything that may embarrass the recipient.
- A gift that is considerably more expensive than your budget allows.
- Anything in bad taste (even though it may be humorous).
- Anything of a sexual nature.
- A substantial gift to a businessperson you are negotiating a deal with.
- Anything that could be offensive for religious, cultural or sexual reasons.

"Gratitude is the most exquisite form of courtesy."

~ Jacques Maritain, French philosopher