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Company
Plus

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How to Re-gift Shamelessly

By Dr. Kathleen Begley, Book Author and Professional Speaker

Note to Readers: Here's another offbeat e-update on business communication and current events from Write Company Plus, a corporate training firm located outside Philadelphia. In respect for your busy schedule, writers and editors have arranged seven at-a-glance ideas at the end of this article. Skip directly there if you lack the time to read the entire document.

For the past few months, newspapers, magazines, and websites have abounded with stories about re-gifting. A voracious reader of pop literature, I've been marveling at how much time and effort journalists gave before Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanza to the increasingly common habit of passing on a gift originally given to you to a third person.

Woman's Day magazine discussed the ethics of practice. The Wall Street Journal traced the history of the custom. MSNBC delved into the psychology of the tradition. All touched on the fact that almost 60 percent of Americans today view re-gifting – which used to be a shameful secret -- as a perfectly acceptable practice. Thank heaven!

In my view, re-gifting is the ultimate in practicality. Instead of dumping an unwanted tie or sweater into the trash, you pass them along to someone who will love and cherish them. Here's a case in point.

About a month ago, while rooting through holiday decorations, I came across a wreath featuring Santa and Sandi Claus dressed in full Philadelphia Eagles regalia. It was a never-used present from heaven-knows-who. I decided to re-gift it to my brother-in-law at a Christmas get-together at my nephew's home. I added to my sister's husband's goodie bag a brand spanking new Eagles throw and an Eagles jacket. What can I tell you? This guy is a football nut.

When I gave my present during a wrappings and ribbons extravaganza, my brother-in-law politely thanked me. I told him to feel free to re-gift any of the three items he didn't want. A few hours later, as I was leaving the family gala to return to my house, I noticed the wreath hanging outside. My brother-in-law already had given it to his son. It may have been the fastest re-gifting since comedian Jerry Seinfeld coined the term in the mid-1990's.

So how did I feel that my re-gift was re-gifted again before I had even left the building? Absolutely joyous! I was delighted that my nephew liked the wreath I had given to his father so much that he hung it up almost instantaneously.

Obviously, I lack the re-gifting resentment gene. My personal philosophy is that recipients, once they become owners of anything I give, are entitled to do anything with it that they darn well please. Why would I want to monitor their behavior anyway?

I tell this story because I feel quite certain that many of you may be wondering today what to do with the excess cologne, slippers, and books you received last Thursday. I highly recommend re-gifting for its speed, ease, and economy. Some added thoughts:

Tell the truth. I know honesty is a weird concept, but I suspect many people would be delighted to know their candy dish sits happily on your friend's coffee table instead of existing sadly in your musty cellar. Think of the gift's feelings, too.



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Abandon guilt. Recognize that a gift is not a relationship. If you choose to give away a miniature glass statuette or a pair of bright orange sweat pants from a well-meaning relative, you are in no way minimizing your love and affection for the giver. You understand another human being can't possibly keep track of all your preferences.

Create a re-gifting depot. Sometime this week, assemble your unusable goodies in a storage container. When birthdays, anniversaries, and other occasions come up through the year, check if you have an appropriate gift stashed away. Note that I say appropriate. As enthusiastic as I am about re-gifting, I'd steer away from giving poker cards to an uncle with a compulsive gambling problem or skis to a cousin who rarely leaves Florida.

Applaud yourself for recycling. In my opinion, re-gifting is the ultimate tribute to the environmental gods. Why load up already crowded landfills with three pairs of clip earrings unsuitable for your pierced ears?

Re-gift to yourself. Remember that storage depot I mentioned a few paragraphs ago? Well, last summer, while rummaging around in mine for a baby gift, I discovered some lavender-scented bath oil that I had tucked away several years ago. Since then, scientists have determined that lavender promotes relaxation and sleep. So guess what? I grabbed the oil and, that same evening, sprayed myself into a veritable coma of peace and serenity.

Use common sense. There are some things that simply should not be re-gifted. Examples include a box of half-eaten chocolates or a bowling shirt with noticeable beer stains.

Avoid the worst sin. In general, you should avoid re-gifting an item to the original giver – except in my case. I'll happily take back just about anything, probably without even remembering that I gave it to you in the first place. The exception is that dried-out fruitcake that has been traveling from person to person to person to person to person since 1917.

Dr. Kathleen Begley owns and operates Write Company Plus communications training. She has written seven books and gives corporate seminars on topics such as writing persuasively, presenting confidently, and managing positively. You can call her at 610-429-1562 or e-mail her at KBegley@writecompanyplus.com. She responds to everybody. If you feel you've become too busy to ever read this free, opt-in e-update, please tell us to remove you from our mailing list. We'll cheerfully delete you.