

A true gift has no strings attached

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Holidays are times when we express our love for one another by exchanging gifts.

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The gift one selects does not need be costly to be given generously or received gratefully.

From time to time we receive things we cannot use or do not want. What do we do with these items given with the best of intentions without offending the generosity of spirit with which they were given?

A reader shared the following:

"Consider this: A gift that you received and did not want at the time may in time become a valued memento of the person from whom it was received. Hold onto things that might be unwanted at the instance of its reception. Put it away if you don't want to see it and take it out at another time to see whether or not it might appeal to you then. And think of your relationship with the person who did thoughtfully give you a gift."

One cardinal rule to remember is that a true gift is given with no strings attached. Otherwise it is not a gift, but an obligation. Don't forget this important dynamic when giving. It's not fun to receive a birthday or Christmas present from someone with the verbal message, "Now don't lose this or break this. It was your great grandmother's." Or perhaps, "Now don't spend all of this in one place." And another favourite, "Save this for just for you two," inferring the gift is not to be shared with others.

Such restrictions undermine the true meaning of giving. Think of it as a pin popping a balloon. There are times when such gifts can be given, but those times are to be private.

Many people consider regifting during the holidays.

One of the more obvious rules for regifting is to be sure not to give the item back to the person who gave it to you in the first place. How embarrassed would you be if you received a gift from someone for whom you had carefully and thoughtfully selected it some time ago?

Another don't is giving something to someone in damaged packaging. It doesn't take a real sleuth to see that a parcel has been previously opened, poorly repackaged and rewrapped. Unless it is intended as a joke, such a gift will likely get a less-than-stellar reception.

Consider donating unwanted gifts to charity. There are many organizations that will pass on unwanted gifts to others who are less fortunate. These groups are adept at doing so with grace and kindness. The saying "one man's trash is another man's treasure" has a lot of truth.

Garage sales are another way to dispose of unwanted possessions. But remember, it can be hurtful for people to see things they have given you show up in a yard sale, despite the cardinal rule of no strings

attached to gift-giving. Be discreet.

Some people tell me they have a special place in a closet or chest where they keep those treasures they want to recycle. We need to use some common sense when sequestering these items.

If something has a shelf life, such as foodstuffs, take it to the local food bank.

The spirit of giving need not be lost in regifting experience. Often the sentiment accompanying a present is more important than the present itself. As well as bringing great joy, a thoughtful gift can also help to heal damaged relationships. Giving from the heart means a great deal.

The holidays are a golden opportunity to teach children about the true meaning of giving. By even broaching the subject of regifting, we make them aware of the importance of the dynamic of exchanging gifts.

I have mentioned in previous columns how certain times of the year serve as punctuation marks for actions that occur throughout the year. Christmas is certainly one of the most striking exclamation points.

Giving and receiving gifts are two of the most prominent holiday traditions, as well as the feelings of warmth and gratitude they engender.

Don't forget that even if you have no intention of keeping the gift, be grateful and acknowledge the kindness and the intention with a lovely handwritten thank you note.

The warmest of seasons greetings to everyone.

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