

5 EMPLOYEE HOLIDAY GIFT MISTAKES



The New Rules
of Giving

Mark S. Repkin

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'Tis the season to be jolly...

And for receiving gifts that are full of folly. (Are you getting ready to shake up your snow globes? Or are you shaking in your boots thinking about the upcoming gift giving?) The holidays are most definitely a time of warm wishes and good cheer. . . but not necessarily good gifts or good taste, especially in the workplace. Most employers have the process down pat:

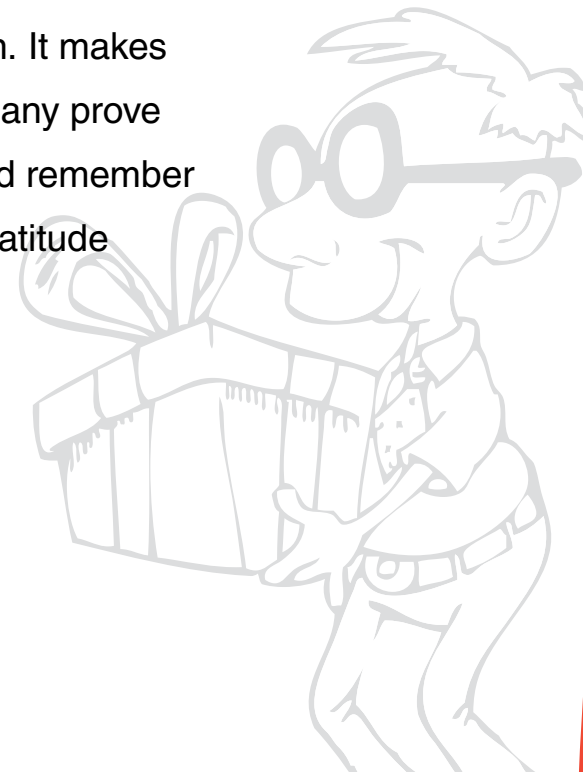
- 1 Companies choose what they think is the perfect gift;
- 2 Employees open said gift; and
- 3 Said gift is never seen again.

Enough said.

Across North America, corporations really do want to acknowledge the dedication and endless hard work their employees put forth day in and day out.

The holidays are a great opportunity to say thank you in a memorable, personal way, to show how much you truly care, and how important these people are to you and your company.

The act of giving symbolizes appreciation and celebration. It makes deserving recipients feel special. But how can your company prove giving *and* receiving are both equally good? Read on, and remember—no matter how tempting it may be—don't throw your gratitude away on a fruitcake.



Do Nothing



You've heard it said before...

there's so much to do in so little time. And yes, the holidays do tend to put additional demands on your calendar. But for the sake of your company, employee gift-giving needs to be placed high on your **“Must Do”** list.

Do you show your gratitude to your personnel throughout the year? You've got long-term dedicated employees who have been with you through thick and thin. There is the team who put together a work plan and successfully cut costs in a big way; the single parents who sacrifice time with their kids when you call an after-hours meeting; the assistant who took on additional responsibilities without so much as a complaint.

Can you remember the last time you even said thanks?

Most employers are guilty of holding in their gratitude during the typical workday. But the days then turn into weeks, and the weeks turn into months. If you let the holidays slide by too, without any display of appreciation, your company is eventually going to face the music. And the songs won't be pretty. You'll be listening to tunes like "Lower Morale Blues" and "We're Not in this Together." Surprised? You shouldn't be. Why would your employees give their best when they don't feel the best is given in return? They're only human. It makes a world of difference to be acknowledged for doing a good job. Show your employees you care, and they'll work even harder and smarter.

When your employees don't get the feel of your appreciation, the reverse is true. Their morale naturally slips. Their attitude begins to stink. They lose their drive to serve your customers well. Good performance doesn't matter. Because, in the minds of your employees, if it actually mattered you would have taken the time to say thank you.

Gift-Giving Mistake 2

Wasting Time



Do you really have the hours to spend on a wild goose chase?

Of course you don't. But year after year, the gift-giving committee still assembles around the table to ponder the impossible—the perfect gift for your employees.

From company to company, the Story of the Corporate Gift plays out with startling similarities. A conference room is quickly filling with dog-eared catalogues full of stale items. Well-suited vendors are talking up the latest and greatest gadgets—gadgets you can easily envision in spring yard sales. The obligatory trip is taken down memory lane with someone reciting the gifts from holidays past. And Joe HR Manager remains firmly grounded on the turkey bandwagon, *“You can never go wrong with meat!”*

As a result of this arduous decision-making process, you've wasted the time, productivity, and resources of each and every member of the committee. And what have you accomplished in return? You found the perfect gift...for re-gifting

Gift-Giving Mistake 3

What did I
get last year?

Achieving
Little or No
Memory Value

Maybe it's a shiny red bicycle with the loudest horn imaginable. Or a pair of earrings that sparkles like a rainbow in the sun. Each of us can look back and fondly remember the who, what, and why associated with the times we were given something special. It's called "memory value."

As an employer, you too want to achieve memory value in your gift-giving.

You want to find a gift that will make your employees smile. A smile that lasts and lasts. You need to find a gift that is strongly related with your company and expresses your gratitude—an unforgettable gift that says, "Thank you for all you've done. You're special to me." Do you really think a spiral ham is going to do that for you?

What about cash or a gift card? Everyone can use a little extra money these days. A monetary gift would make one fine memory, right? Wrong! Cash and gift cards are disposable commodities. When the purchase is made, the gift is gone and forgotten (not to mention that the gift card itself may become lost or forgotten in the junk drawer). Besides that, gift cards force your employees to shop at the store of your choice, not theirs. Remember, your employees have individual preferences; they are not ***your*** shopping clones. And did you really give them enough to make the entire purchase, or did your beloved employees need to shell out some of their own money? If not, you just gave them half a gift.

Okay, so monetary gifts have some definite drawbacks, you say, but won't my employees think of me when they wear the nice sweater bought with my gift card? Sorry, wrong again. Warm thoughts of you grew cold soon after the gift card was opened. The memory value, what little there is, quickly transfers to the company where the gift was purchased. It's not you, but the retailer who gets the "credit" in more ways than one. Your intentions were nothing less than good; in the end, however, the memory value of cash gifts is...well, um...what were we talking about?...fleeting.

Is this all
I'm worth?



Including the Price Tags

We scrape, we scratch, we vigorously cross out. From the time of our youth, most of us are schooled that it's not polite to overtly reveal a gift's price. But when employers give cash or gift cards, they are, in essence, breaking that gift-giving commandment.

There's no disguising the value of money, no matter its form.

And it's human nature to evaluate that value. The recipient's emotions can run the gamut from "Is this all I'm worth?" to "Why not spend this money on fixing up the lunchroom?" Too much, too little, never right.

Once you offer a cash-based gift, you're also setting a precedent. Over time, employees will expect you to increase the amount of the gift, i.e., as the cost of living rises or company profits increase, so should the value of the gift. It's the escalation principal in action. Conversely, if budgets are cut or the management changes direction, your gift-giving program may take a big hit and knock out your employee morale.

Assuming One Size Fits All



It may be the **thought** that counts,
but it's the **perception** that can be devastating.

The gift-giving maxim “one size does not fit all” is especially true in the workplace. Each employee is made up of a unique blend of likes, dislikes, interests, and beliefs. Vegetarians work side by side with weekend hunters. Chocoholics may carpool with life-long diabetics. Non-drinkers gossip with wine enthusiasts around the water cooler. Gifts that are appreciated by some may be highly offensive to others—and the offended are likely to vocalize why the gift was in poor taste and/or politically incorrect.

In contrast, smart companies carefully recognize the diversity in its workforce—especially during the holiday season—with gift options that allow employees to choose their own gifts.



WHY?

So, Why Do Some Employee Holiday Gifts Fail?

As we've discussed, showing your gratitude is way more complicated than most employers imagine. While many companies wisely choose the holidays as the perfect time to show appreciation, things often go awry.

Depending upon which holiday gift is selected for your employees, there can be issues with size, color and appeal, not to mention the pitfalls of durability, delivery and duplication. Some companies avoid the "present" route and go with cash or gift cards—but lose the opportunity for memory value entirely.

The bottom line unwrapped:

It's virtually impossible to make your employees happy by fitting them all in one gift box.

But step back a moment...

- 1 Do your employees truly understand how important they are to you?
- 2 Do they see how their work each day contributes to the overall mission of the organization?
- 3 Do they have a sense of empowerment in their jobs?

Most employers find that the best way to avoid the 5 Employee Holiday Gift Mistakes is often as simple as giving employees the **gift of choice**.

When you let your employees choose their own gifts you are not only acknowledging their work throughout the year, you are permitting them to make their own decisions. And what better way to reinforce a sense of employee empowerment than through your employee holiday gift this year?



Giving Employees the Gift of Choice

You want to send the right message, to be fondly remembered. You want gift-giving perfection. You want your gift to be something your employees will cherish, not a Pandora's Box of politically incorrect items.

What you need is a Gift of Choice program like we offer with our Gift Booklets

Our gift program puts the “wonder” back in gift-giving as your employees receive the gifts they really want.

And our program is wrapped up, literally, in an exquisite presentation that features your own message on a themed insert or corporate letterhead. It's an opportunity to put into words how much your employees mean to you.

The process is very simple. You determine your per-gift budget—there are 18 levels from \$20 to \$5,000 —and your employees then select from more than 100 merchandise options of identically priced, high-quality, brand-name items.

They can page through a full-color booklet or click through a website. No prices ever appear anywhere—the monetary value is known only to you.

Gifts are sent directly to the employee's address, and shipping is included when shipped within the contiguous United States. Of course, satisfaction is guaranteed 100%, and exchanges are made at no extra cost. Like you, we want your employees to be happy. With no strings attached.

That's why our Gift Booklets are your key for successful holiday gift-giving.

It's the gift that enables employees to **choose** their own gifts from a large selection of name-brand merchandise, so you don't have to guess what they'd really like, use, or enjoy.

With Gift Booklets:

- 1 There's no worry, trouble, or wasted time. All you do is decide how much you'd like to spend for each employee (there are 18 different price levels to meet the needs of every corporate budget). Your employees will have fun selecting their gift from an upscale, full-color, printed booklet, or they can visit a secure website and choose from an even wider array of gifts. No more wild goose chases in search of the perfect gift.
- 2 There's no staging or storage. No logistics. Selected gifts are delivered directly to the employee's specified address.
- 3 There's no re-gifting. Because your employees pick out their own gifts, you know they'll love it! Your gift will truly be appreciated and, of course, memorable—for each and every employee.

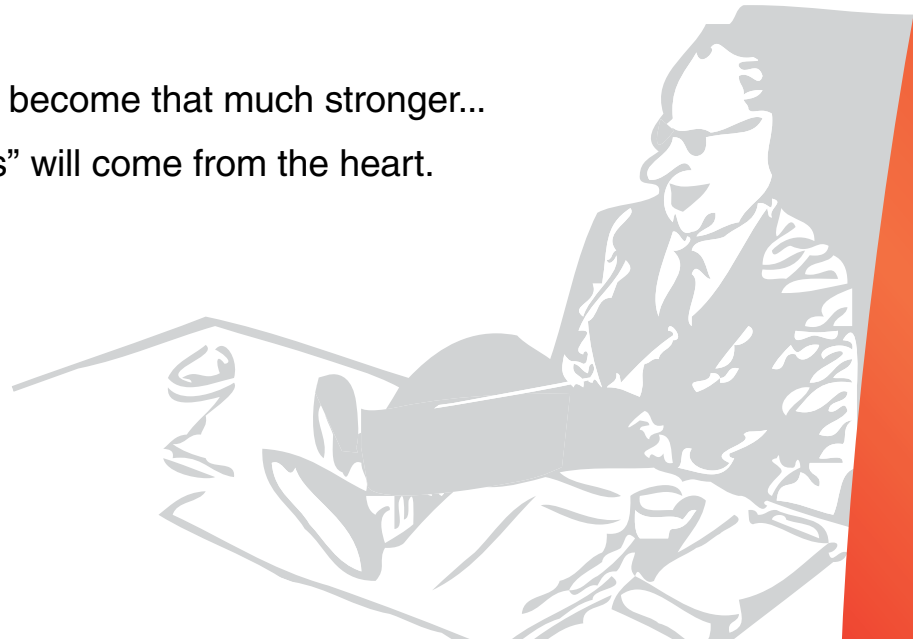
- 4 There's a 100% satisfaction guarantee. What happens if your gift arrives damaged, or your employee changes their mind (maybe the white coffee pot is just a bit *too* white for their kitchen)? The item is picked up from their home, and a newly selected gift will soon be delivered in its place. No shipping charges. No problems. Ever.
- 5 There are no employees left behind. Got stragglers? With the busy lives we all lead, it's easy to let some "to-do's" go undone. Redemption reports let you know exactly who received what, and who has yet to select a gift.

With Our Gift Booklets All You Have To Do Is...

...Select the quantities of each level you want, hand out the gift booklets to your employees, and relax and enjoy the smiles on your employee's faces.

Banish your worries of holidays past, and this year use Gift Booklets. You'll be amazed at how much time you'll save, and how easy they've made your gift-giving process—from merchandise selection to front-door delivery. Most importantly, you'll be giving gifts employees truly want or need.

Your company-employee relationship will become that much stronger... because this year, employee "thank you's" will come from the heart.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Based upon over 15 years of experience helping a broad range of companies in the methodology, design, and implementation of incentive and recognition programs, Mark Repkin, is recognized as an industry leader and consummate mentor. Mark develops programs to inform and educate business professionals in best practices for human performance management and strategic program execution.

Mark currently serves on the Board of Trustees for the Incentive Research Foundation and is actively engaged in the Incentive Marketing Association's (IMA) strategic industry group, The Recognition Council. Mark was recently recognized by his industry's peers with the IMA's Rising Star Award, for his contributions in the development of pioneering educational curriculum. In addition, Mark's philanthropic endeavors include serving a full tenure on the Board of Directors for the Illinois Fatherhood Initiative and serving on the Board of Advisors for DePaul University's suburban campuses.

Note: Mark is available for speaking engagements and teleseminars.





We are devoted to making gift giving and receiving a pleasurable experience for all. Our personable team of representatives assists employers in developing programs that inspire productivity and healthy competition in the workplace. We help companies successfully motivate their employees, recognize performance and create positive work environments by utilizing Incentive Point-Programs and Memorable Gift Booklets.

In their efforts to motivate their employees, companies often fall short-and misspend resources-by offering one-size-fits-all incentive programs. With our programs, companies can align incentives with each employee's unique set of preferences and tastes. By placing the "power of choice" in their employee's hands, managers can maximize individual and company-wide performance.

