

# How to Give Gifts Unconditionally

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Giving gifts unconditionally is not necessarily simple. Gift giving can sometimes feel like a chore that makes us resentful. Other times we give gifts in order to get something in return, even if it is simply the gratitude from the recipient. Seen in this light, we are really giving to get what Daniel Goleman terms a "narcissistic hit", something that isn't exactly motivated by altruism.

How can we learn to give gifts without strings attached when we are accustomed to feeling either a sense of duty, or we want gratitude from others in return? Unconditional gift-giving starts by sharing a piece of yourself - your love or esteem and care for the other person shown by the time taken to select a gift in a considerate manner, and combining this with not wanting anything at all in return.

## Things You'll Need

- ☐ Gift wrapping paper (and other presentation effects)
- ☐ *The Gift of the Magi*

## Steps



**1 Find a gift that means something about the other person to you.** Be proud of what you choose. Don't just buy something because it is in the bargain bin or because it was the most expensive item in the store. Put effort, care and consideration into the purchase or creation of the gift. Making the gift yourself is definitely an option too, and is even more a "piece of you", so feel free to do so.



**2 Let it be a surprise.** A gift prompted by persistent requests for it is not as exciting or fulfilling as a gift that is a total surprise. This does not mean that you cannot give things sorely needed by the recipient but how you will know this is by observing their life and knowing them, rather than heeding direct requests for items.



**3 Think beyond stuff.** Stuff is all very nice and cute when wrapped up but stuff ends up drowning us. Sometimes, giving stuff is giving a burden to another person and the "condition" involved in such a gift is that the recipient puts up with shelving your stuff in their already over-crowded life. If you are gifting the "person-who-has-everything", avoid stuff. Consider alternatives that won't oblige the condition of adding to clutter on the recipient, gifts such as:

- A promise to visit monthly to take an elderly recipient to art galleries or botanical gardens;
- A service - nappy (diaper) washing service, house-cleaning service, car-wash etc.
- Plants for the garden that will produce food, scent, colour or shade
- A voucher for a massage, spa treatment, fitness class



**4 Think carefully about what the other person would not buy for themselves.** If you give items that a person is already very adept at getting for themselves, muzzling in on this territory can be a means of invading it and substituting their sense of style with yours. Don't even bother; if you know the person well, you will know already what they do well enough without your help. Look instead for the things they'd never consider purchasing - like the red shoes with really high heels you overheard them pondering about but muttered that they couldn't afford, a trip to a spa resort that they would never think to slow down for normally, or a new food that is something they've never tried before etc.



**5 Let the recipient know gently and without great "hoo-ha" that your gift can be returned to a store, re-gifted, or donated if it doesn't make them feel comfortable or happy.** You do not want to create a noose around their necks. If you ever had an experience growing up when someone in your family gave your family something hideous and it was ferreted out each time this person visited, you will know that the sense of obligation can turn gift-receiving into a burden rather than a delight.





**6 Avoid giving "useful" items that the whole household needs and will make use of.** The toaster for mother on Mother's Day, the car-cleaning gear for dad... These things do service for everyone and are not gifts in the usual sense. An exception would be if you give something like the car-cleaning gear, include with it "coupons" the recipient can cash in to you to wash and wax the car for them. Otherwise, if you must produce such items as gifts, gift them to the house, the car, or the family as a whole. These sorts of items are just too impersonal to be true gifts and this makes them conditional--you are giving something provided that everyone else gets to use it.



**7 Expect nothing in return.** You are giving because you want to. If you don't want to, then you need to reassess the point of what it is that you are really doing. Do not expect gratitude, smiles or something in return. Although most respectful and well-mannered people will demonstrate gratitude, there are times where this will not be forthcoming for one reason or other but that does not necessarily mean that the person doesn't respect your gift-giving or not appreciate it. Sometimes people are embarrassed, too surprised, shy, ashamed, or self-conscious to react in a gracious manner. If you have given with good heart, their reaction or lack of one should not bother you. Look deeper and you will see truly how the gift has been received.



**8 Be considerate about presentation.** Wrapping and presenting the gift will show your sense of style and also that you have taken care to present your gift nicely, a demonstration of respect for the recipient. It doesn't have to be complex, and recyclability is *de rigueur*.



## Community Q&A

### Question

I'm doing a project and we are going to the elderly ward in the hospital. I don't know anyone there, but I wanted to take a nice gift. What could I give that is a unisex gift?



**HumanBeing**  
Top Answerer

Here are some suggestions for gifts for people on an geriatric ward: photo frames, luxury food items, plants (not flowers), mugs, jigsaw puzzles, general interest coffee table books (wildlife, geography, history topics, etc.), fleece blankets and talking books.

Helpful 7 Not Helpful 0

### Question

If I am invited to a birthday party (in another state) and I cannot attend, do I still send a gift?



Community Answer

No. You can send a birthday card if you'd like.

Helpful 8 Not Helpful 2

#### Question

**What do I do if my client gave me an expensive gift? I am a counselor.**



Community Answer

If your client gave you an expensive gift, you can either gently refuse and give it back, if you think it was too much, or you can accept it and give them something in return. It does not have to be something of equal value. Maybe your client just wanted to show you their appreciation for a job well done!

Helpful 8 Not Helpful 2

#### Question

**What do I do if someone does not react the way I expect when giving a gift?**



HumanBeing  
Top Answerer

If you are giving your gift unconditionally, the reaction should not matter; you should not expect any reaction when giving unconditionally. If your gift gets a negative reaction, ask what you can do to put things right. If the gift gets a more positive reaction than you were expecting, there is no problem. If the person is ungrateful, ambivalent or otherwise, then you have to handle their response without reaction.

Helpful 7 Not Helpful 1

#### Question

**How does the person that you give a gift card to know the amount of the card if the amount is not on the card?**



Community Answer

They can always find out by calling the number or visiting the website indicated on the back of the card. But to save them the hassle, it's generally advisable to make it clear to begin with. Most gift cards come with a little card/gift card holder that has the amount printed on it or has a space for you to write in the amount that's on the card.

Helpful 3 Not Helpful 0

#### Question

**Do people give anniversary gifts?**



Community Answer

Yes, people do typically give anniversary gifts.

Helpful 4 Not Helpful 0

#### Question

**How do I give one friend a gift without my other friend realizing?**



Community Answer

Unless the two friends are close, there really shouldn't be any difficulty. Your friendship should have no behind-the-back treading, so just relax. Unless both friends gave you gifts, you really shouldn't be in dire need of hiding a gift.

Helpful 7 Not Helpful 4

### Question

What do I do if the person giving the gift then later throws it in my face as to how much they helped me by giving me their gift?



Community Answer

This is a hard place to be. Hopefully, they won't remember/bring it up a few weeks later. If it is something they see often, they might remember (phone case, pencil case, coffee mug). There are two good roads to follow here: 1) agree with them, but only if they mention it once or twice; and 2), if they bring it up again and again, you might want to nod and just barely acknowledge they said it and they might let it drop. And if they keep going on about it, say something like: "Okay, you've said that a lot of times now, I've also told you a lot I like the gift but please, can we let this discussion about it drop now? It's getting old!".

Helpful 2 Not Helpful 0

### Question

What do you say when someone says no gifts? I thought gifts were something from the heart- a word, a letter, a card, a gesture, something?



**Josie Botta**  
Community Answer

This could be a personal thing. Like, for example, if this a birthday party, they might not want any gifts because they got a lot from family. So, it is best if you don't take it personally.

Helpful 0 Not Helpful 0



### Tips

- If both the gift-giver and the recipient are well-versed in civil interactions, the giving of gifts unconditionally will go very smoothly; the giver will give without expecting anything back and the recipient will show appreciation without prompting. That's an ideal world and mitigating factors always intervene, so always be generous in your interpretation of the recipient's reaction. Maybe not today, but some day down the track, you might learn that your act of selfless generosity and kindness turned that person's life around.
- Read O. Henry's *The Gift of the Magi* to discover something about selfless giving and the power of love over possessions.
- The ultimate unconditional gift is the anonymous gift.
- Try giving gifts on a random day. It goes a long way to show that you do not expect something back if you give a gift for no reason.

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