



Thinking Outside the (Gift-Giving) Box

Holiday shopping advice
from "The Gift Guru"
Robyn Freedman Spizman



For two decades, author, consumer advocate, and mom Robyn Freedman Spizman has been one of the country's leading gift-giving experts. Recently

Robyn dropped by The Front Porch to help all of us decide what to buy for Uncle Paul, Cousin Camie, Best Friend Jeff, Colleague Katie, . . .

THE FRONT PORCH: What are the popular trends and themes in gift selection this year?

ROBYN: Gifts people can use. People don't like receiving items that will just go in the closet, so gifts they can use are always popular. For example, Bank of America has 19 new gift card designs that can be purchased from \$25 to \$600. These gift cards can be used in more than 24 million locations. This way, gift givers don't have to guess about clothes sizes or worry about returning a gift. The real key to making this gift special is that you can personalize the card by putting someone's name on it or by creating different themes such as roses, travel, etc., depending on the person's interests. Log onto www.bankofamerica.com/giftcard for more information.

That's a versatile idea. What if you want to buy something that specifically fits a person?

Have someone sit down with a catalog and circle their favorite items. It's kind of like a Sherlock Holmes adventure. They won't know which item you're going to pick, but it allows them to show their preferences.

Like we used to do with the Sears catalog.

Yes, just like that. Boy, does that bring back some memories.

Let's say you're able to spend \$40 on someone.

In general, it is better to buy one \$40 gift or two \$20 gifts?

This really depends upon the person. For example, if I were buying a gift for a teenager, I might give a \$20 gift certificate to Blockbuster as well as a popular DVD. However I would place the gift certificate in the DVD, providing instant gift wrapping. My book *The Gift of Choice* discusses this idea of a surprise within a surprise.

If you've lived with someone for 25 years, is it really necessary to be creative? Why not just get him a new shirt each year? He can always use a shirt.

No, no, no, no, no. My book *When Words Matter Most* discusses the importance of having every occasion memorable. If you do decide to give a shirt, at least put an "I love you" message in the pocket. Or, for example, if you give a shirt to your dad, write a little note that says, "Thanks for giving me the shirt off your back." Or if you've been married for 30 years, write out 30 ways you adore her.

What about someone who has a birthday very close to the holidays. Do I have to give two gifts? It's so tempting to say, "Well, this is for your birthday and Christmas."

Great question. It's occasionally acceptable to do that if the gift is twice as amazing. However, Christmas should be special and treated as such. Find

ways to double their pleasure. This can be done by giving a pair of something, like two sets of earrings. The key here is thinking outside of the traditional gift-giving box. Jewelry is one of the top gift choices. Tiffany's has gold coins that function as gift certificates—very popular gifts. Give someone a gold coin as a gift and then, two days later, another gold coin. Write a little note that says, "You have a heart of gold." It's the little word touches that make gifts special—and they are fabulous and free!

What if I receive a gift from someone I didn't buy for? Am I obligated?

The important thing is to show an attitude of gratitude. Focus on the gift and the sentiment, and be a gracious receiver. If your first feelings are embarrassment instead of appreciation, the giver will remember that emotion instead of how much you liked the gift. Don't bring up the fact that you don't have a gift for them—just focus your attention on how much you appreciated the sentiment. And don't necessarily feel obligated to give a gift back. It depends on the circumstances.

How about gifts for kids? Sometimes it's hard for an uncle or aunt to know what to give their niece or nephew.

The way in which you give a gift is important. You could order a gift card and have it tied around a stuffed animal with a ribbon, or have it put in a piñata—both are clever ideas that make a gift special to a child.

What's one of the best gifts you've ever received?

I have two favorite gifts. First, I received a book from my husband and children that was bound and designed by them. Since they know I love Dalmatians, spots were all over the book, and they had written, "The minute we spotted you, we knew you were the one for us." They also had family members write their thoughts about me. And it had baby pictures as well as our wedding photo in the book.

Another gift that I love is a watch given to me by my husband. I had wanted this watch for a very long time, and the way he gave it to me made it extra special. He attached the watch to the back of a Teddy Bear, and he wrote, "I can't bear to be without you."

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Want to hear more from Robyn? Look for her new monthly column, "Smarter, Better, Brighter," in The Front Porch's new subscriber edition.

