

The Moral Dilemma of Gifting

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Gift – giving is a fundamental part of any relationship, personal or business. The concept of giving gifts has been observed since the early beginnings of time and social relationships. It has and continues to be used to express love, care, and appreciation in almost every culture in the world. However, at the root of it, the act of gift-giving can have the underlying motive of expected reciprocity between the two parties, as highlighted in a [study](#) by Smith. For that reason and some others that will be explored in this paper, there is a moral responsibility that accompanies the giving of a gift. Morality can be analyzed in any given situation or for any action, gift-giving is no different than any other situation.

[Godbout](#) explains that a gift often is representative of the value of the relationship, it can be descriptive of the relationship changing. That can make the process of gifting quite challenging because the exchange of gifts relies largely on reciprocity and debt. Should the nature of the relationship change, the people involved might face a battle of morals between reciprocating the present that they received or giving a present that is more representative of the current relationship.

While on the surface, giving a gift may seem like an altruistic and selfless action. Upon deeper examination, there is some sort of expectation attached when giving a gift, either some sort of reciprocity or benefit in the long run. Furthermore, the action can create a moral and ethical dilemma, depending on the context of the situation.

The issue of the ethical dilemma in business can be especially apparent in the corporate world, with other businesses and/or consumers. Since gift-giving can require a lot of effort and expense, there surely must be a reason behind spending those resources to show appreciation. When a company sends gifts to other companies, or clients or even potential clients, there is an

expectation to strengthen the relationship between the two parties. In the case of clients and consumers, it is a way to improve the company's image and make the customer feel valued, so they continue to rely on the company in the future. Both scenarios benefit the company that is giving the gift in one way or another. The reciprocity is present because the recipient will likely have done something to warrant receiving a gift and the giver is trying to reciprocate. Gift-giving creates this cycle of reciprocity and debt where both parties follow through to preserve the relationship at hand.

Additionally, another moral dilemma that is faced when giving a gift in corporate relationships is bribery. While differentiating between bribery and gifting is simple, the lines between the two can get blurred depending on the context, as highlighted by Nadler & Schulman in their [research paper](#). The main difference between a gift and a bribe is the expectation. In the same aforementioned [paper](#), Nadler and Schulman also explain that while a gift is free from any expectations of benefit or influence, a bribe is done with the expectation of influence and benefit. However, it can be hard to gauge the expectations of the giver when they give a gift but there are several things to consider if there is doubt. [According to Irwin](#), one of the things to consider is the timing of the gift, was it given for a special occasion or close to a major deal? Another thing to consider is the overall value of the gift, is it appropriate for the relationship or is it simply too extravagant of a gift? Since reciprocity is a part of the process of gift-giving, it can get overwhelming to wonder about the intentions and the expectations of the giver. That is why many businesses have policies regarding accepting and giving gifts, to avoid potential trouble with unethical blame.

The complex nature of gift-giving does not mean that the entire process is unethical or immoral. Most of the time, giving a gift is given with the intention of showing appreciation to

the recipient and strengthen the relationship, even in a corporate setting. It can be used to show the consumer that they are valued by the company. However, it can be twisted into the opposite, depending on the intentions of the giver. But at the core of it, the act of gift-giving can be a genuine action without any ulterior motives.

References

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