

Is It The Thought That Counts?

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Apart from the obvious financial hit that can influence us when choosing a gift for someone, another potential headache is that gifts can be imbued with meaning. Gift giving is one of the ways in which the pictures and thoughts that others have of us (and we of them) are transmitted via a tangible object. The giver needs to be sufficiently aware of the receiver to understand how the gift might be interpreted.

When giving clothes, for example, if we get it wrong it can expose us to being interpreted as lacking understanding of the receiver, or perhaps simply that we have bad taste! Another mistake that givers might make, perhaps when they are busy and are having difficulty finding the time to buy that perfect gift, is to buy a gift that they like – which doesn't always work for the receiver.

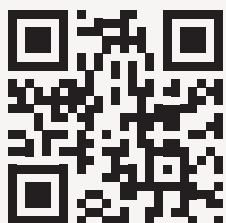
To get it right, the giver needs to be sufficiently aware of the receiver to understand how their motives will be interpreted.

Adrian Furnham, professor of psychology at University College London explains that there are five features that can make gifts especially valuable in meaning, no matter the cost:

1. **When the gift reflects a sense of the personal history of the relationship** e.g. a gift that represents a time and place which holds nostalgia for the relationship – for example an old photo from a meaningful event lovingly mounted in a handmade frame
2. **Time sacrifice** – gifts that have taken time to make by hand (perhaps something hand painted, carved or sewn)
3. **Surprise** – an unexpected gift is valuable because it was not anticipated
4. **Help/cheer a person up** – if the gift is given in order to help the recipient this can be seen as an act of kindness or as a direct indication of care
5. **The 'perfect thing'** – the better the giver knows the recipient's personality, humour, hopes or hobbies the more subtle they can be in choosing the perfect gift. The perfect gift is wanted, needed and appreciated and has been very thoughtfully chosen.

Ultimately, what makes a gift special is our ability to understand the recipient's uniqueness and reflect that through the gift. We all want to believe we are loved for characteristics that make us uniquely valuable to others and so we want to enhance the beloved recipient's sense of their inherent value.

But how can we know if we have got it right? A person who always gets it right is very uncommon - even when we know someone very well we can still get it wrong sometimes. So don't get too hooked up on getting it right every time. Try looking at gift giving as an opportunity to learn more about what your friends and families like and dislike and in doing so make your relationships stronger. If you get it wrong - there is always next year!



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