

5 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF WHEN CHOOSING TEAM GIFTS

On the surface, finding the right gift for your team can seem like the cream puff task on your to-do list. But when you get down to it, selecting the right gift can be perplexing. Choosing gifts is especially challenging if you have a diverse team with varied tastes. Here are five questions to ask yourself when you go shopping for your next gift.

1. What's Been Done Before?

There's a great line in the children's book *Only One You* by Linda Krantz. It says: "Follow when necessary. Stand out when you can." This advice rings true for gift-giving in any environment, but especially in Corporate America. Be cognizant of your organization's norms for the types of gifts and the cost per item. Take into consideration the value of prizes given for company contests.

Let's say the biggest award your organization offers on an annual basis is a \$50 gift certificate. Gifts given as team rewards should be valued at less than \$50, unless the team is being rewarded for a phenomenal accomplishment. Otherwise, management may feel one-upped by your generous gift. The contrary is also true. If your organization frequently gives gracious gifts to its employees, any gifts you give should be appropriately generous – either in thoughtfulness or dollar value.

To make your gift stand out, give something unique to your organization. If your organization is known for food gift baskets, you might consider giving a business or leisure reading book that matches the theme of your team or project. The book will be a special memento if the cover is imprinted with your team motto or project logo. Unique gifts are a great way to make your gift-giving gesture stand out, especially when you don't have a lot of money to spend.

2. What's the Weather?

People like gifts they can use right away. This is one reason that food gifts are so popular. Consider the season during which the gift will be given. If you are hosting a team event or professional conference in the summer, consider giving the attendees a gift that is especially suited to the warm weather. A sports bottle can be used at the event to hold beverages, and then enjoyed on a weekend hike. A document-shaped cooler bag can be used to hold papers at a conference, and then used to carry drinks and food to the beach. T-shirts make great summer gifts. Sweatshirts are most appropriate during the winter months. Jerseys work well for the spring and fall.

3. Should I Give a Customized Gift?

Some gifts are always customized. For example, an award plaque always has the name of the award and the name of the winning person or team imprinted on it. A t-shirt typically has a customized logo or phrase on it. Some gifts are rarely customized, for example flowers.

Most gifts can be customized easily and with relatively little expense.

*Logos can be embossed in chocolate and other food items

*Text can be engraved or imprinted on USB drives and thousands of other functional items you use everyday

*Even crayons and chewing gum can be customized with a team logo!

When you drink coffee from your cup with "Quality Circle Winner" emblazoned on the side, a little part of you remembers the contest you won. That's the power of customization. However, customization is not appropriate for all gifts. The value of high end electronics, fine apparel, and artwork would all be diminished with a big fat logo emblazoned on them. Leave it blank when necessary. Customize when you can.

4. How Many Gifts Do I Need?

The only thing that feels worse than being neglected, is feeling horrible because you inadvertently

neglected someone. Although it may cost you a little more, it's always best to purchase a few extra gifts. A good rule of thumb is 5-10% extra, depending on the cost of each item (the greater the cost, obviously the fewer the extras.)

Project Managers of large teams are at a special risk for under-counting the number of gifts needed. Sometimes teams are so large that we don't realize all of the people who contributed until we hear through the grapevine that we forgot to give someone a gift. If the neglected person is well connected or very vocal, this gaffe could cause a really big problem! Equally important: Don't forget to give gifts to administrative assistants and other support personnel who silently and diligently look out for you on a regular basis. Bottom line: Order extras. Leftovers can be given to new people who join the team later on – it will make them feel instantly like they are part of the team.

5. How Will I Distribute Them?

To ensure you select a gift that isn't a distribution nightmare, craft a quick distribution plan before you purchase your gifts. Here are some considerations:

*For all teams: Keep a list of each recipient and a record of each gift delivered. If a team member is not at his/her desk when you arrive, consider leaving a note so they know who the gift is from.

*Geographically dispersed teams: Shipping expenses for heavy items like crystal and mugs can be quite costly. Ice packs may be needed for shipping chocolate or other melting foods during summer months. Arrange for equipment or assistance in advance if you need to carry gifts to various floors or buildings.

*International teams: Make sure the gift can be sent abroad without excessive tariffs or shipping expenses. Consider dietary and apparel customs of other countries. Consider recreational customs of other countries. (Golf isn't popular everywhere. Women don't wear t-shirts in some countries.)

*Large program with multiple teams: Consider having each team leader distribute the gifts to his/her team. It will save you time, and the team leader may be able to deliver a more genuine message of thanks.

Tell Them Why

You selected your gifts and they turned out even better than you expected. Now comes the fun part – giving! To maximize the benefit of your gifts, be sure to communicate clearly why the recipients are receiving them. Are you trying to build team spirit? Have they been working heads-down for several months to make a tough deadline? Did they reach a milestone? Your team members will appreciate their gifts more when they understand the intention and sincerity of your gesture.