

CORPORATE GIFT – GIVING

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Gift-giving in the business world can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, gift-giving can be an excellent way to build lasting business relationships. Whether we actually use the gift is irrelevant. There is something about receiving a gift that just makes us feel good and consequently, makes us feel good about the person who has given us the gift. However, if a gift is inappropriate in content or context, it can damage or even destroy relationships as quickly as any other type of negative interaction.

Business gifts can have varied cultural import preparing for an international business trip requires detailed planning and preparation of flights, client meetings, presentations and translators. However in additional item for your business travel checklist should always include the selection of an appropriate corporate gift, sensitive to the business occasion and culture.

Business gifts are given for a variety of reasons. The most common reasons are:

- To thank someone. Thank-you gifts are very common in the business world. They are often given when someone has gone beyond their normal call of duty to help you with something and has received no compensation for doing so.
- To congratulate someone. When people have received promotions or raises, or have accomplished anything of major consequence, it is cause for celebration. As such, it is a perfect time to present someone with a gift.
- To encourage someone. People who are struggling with major personal goals often need encouragement. If you manage someone who is striving to improve themselves, a gift of encouragement may very well be one of the strongest motivators you can give them.
- To cheer someone up. Everyone has down days. By presenting an employee or co-worker with a small gift, it lets them know that they are not alone.
- To help someone. Sometimes people struggle because they don't have the proper tools they need to do their job. For instance, they may need to improve their human relations skills or they may need to learn a new software program. Gifts that help someone do a better job end up helping both of you.

Some multi-national companies and some governments have very strict policies regarding their employees accepting gifts. To avoid creating a problem, it's imperative you learn the policies for the companies you do business with.

Do a little research; find out what their interests and hobbies are. They will be impressed that you took the time to discover what they like and will feel comfortable in knowing that this wasn't just some anonymous purchase.

Many companies also have clauses in place concerning alcohol and smoking – related gifts as well, which can create potential health risks. Therefore, if you are not sure about the cultural context of the gift, it is the best to stay away from giving wine, liquor, barware, cigars, cigarette lighters and the like.

The value of the gift depends upon the hierarchy in the company. The higher position a person holds the more expensive the gift should be. Also, be sure to never give similar gifts to all those you are gifting.

But in today's world, with global companies, as well as countries populated and influenced by different religions and cultures, it's important to build good business relationships by taking the time to learn more about the person you're doing business with. This knowledge will give you insight into choosing more meaningful gifts, that the recipient will know was specifically selected for him or her, and be more appreciated.

The following details on different cultures and religions are guidelines to follow when selecting and giving gifts.

In Asian culture the gift – giving, it is a specific ceremony, that is very important. But between Chinese and Japanese cultures there are two main differences.

For example, in China in order not to appear greedy, a gift will not be immediately taken, but refused three times before finally being accepted. Each time it's refused, you as the giver must graciously continue to offer the gift. And once it's taken, tell the person you're happy it's been accepted, it's because of official business policy considers gifts as bribes, which are illegal. Though the policy is softening, there may be times when a gift you offer will absolutely not be accepted. Should you find yourself in this situation, graciously say you understand and withdraw it. Waiting until negotiations have concluded will eliminate the appearance of bribery when a gift is presented. On the other hand in Japan the gift-giving is an art form, representing friendship, respect, and gratitude. The gift is always in a gift box, or beautifully wrapped in quality paper, and given with great respect. Because the symbolism is what's important, frequently the actual gift may be very modest. If you have a gift to present, don't pop up at the end of the meeting with it. You don't want to surprise your Japanese associate. The proper procedure is to tell him or her sometime during the meeting that you have a small gift, or gifts, you'll want to present at the end of the meeting. This verbal cue respects the protocol, and allows the opportunity to make arrangements for any additional people who may need to come into the meeting for the presentation.

In the Muslim culture, the Koran forbids alcohol. Gifts of liquor or any product that contains alcohol, such as perfume, would never be selected to give. Also, forbidden are products or foods from scavengers, which includes pork, birds, and shellfish. So a leather item made from pig skin or ostrich could not be given, nor any food from these groups.

Gifts are presented using the right hand, or both hands. The left hand is never used alone to hand someone a gift, as it's considered unclean.

Cultures without strong gift-giving traditions - European cultures and countries influenced by these cultures, don't use gifts as an integral component of a business relationship. This doesn't mean an occasional and appropriate gift is not appreciated. It means, a person is not expected to present a gift on the first meeting, or on a routine basis.

There are some countries in which a small gift is expected at the first meeting. These include Japan, Indonesia, Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, Bolivia, Columbia, Costa Rica, Russia, Poland, and Ukraine. And in other countries you don't need to give an item with your company logo. These are Belgium, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain.

In conclusion, international gift-giving protocol varies from country to country. The above tips are meant to be used as initial guidance, however they should not be considered totally comprehensive. There are numerous customs not listed here. Before presenting a gift to an important foreign colleague, do a little research on the customs and protocol.

When looking at office gifts, always ask yourself, "How would I feel if I received this gift from a business associate?" As with any gift giving opportunity, giving a gift that you have put some thought into will be reflected in the gift. Your gift will leave an impression with the recipient, make sure it leaves the impression you want to give.

For the most part, gift-giving is a positive way to build strong relationships in the business world. By knowing how to use them appropriately, you will be able to effectively reach out to others.