

What Your Gifts Say About Your Relationship



By Amy Osmond Cook, Ph.D.

When it comes to gifts, I am an expert—at receiving them. I love gifts of any kind ... from other people. (No, I'm not going to buy myself a \$285,000 pink Bentley like Paris Hilton did last year.) The problem is, when it comes to giving gifts, I am a nervous wreck.

Gift giving represents two things: (1) that you care about a person enough to give a gift, and (2) that you know a person well enough to give something that he or she will like. Mess one of those up, and it does some damage to your relationship.

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Take, for example, the gift I gave to my husband five years ago. We were newly married, and I wanted to get him something personal and meaningful. He loves golf, and he's a funny guy—so I thought the trick remote control golf ball (that you can move when your opponent is about to swing) was going to be a hit. I waited in anticipation as he opened the box and saw a momentary look of confusion before he masked it with a smile. He thanked me and said that he loved it, but the damage was done. In that one look, I knew that my gift had tanked.

Fast forward five years. After watching him play golf (a lot!) and listening to his golfing adventures with his buddies (a lot more!), I would never give him a remote control golf ball. I now know that, for him, the rules of golf are sacred.

A serious golfer never tries to move an opponent's ball—especially for a laugh. It violates one of the cardinal rules of sportsmanship. (So does laughing at someone when he shanks his shot – I found out the hard way!) My gift bombed because I didn't know my husband well enough. I knew that he loved golf, but I missed the intricate details.

Stories like mine are a dime a dozen—a woman receives a vacuum cleaner from her husband, and she runs to her room and cries.

A man receives a toolbox and feels ashamed that he doesn't know how to use the tools inside. For better or worse, we attach special meaning to gifts, especially over the holidays.

So if you want to put some currency in your partner's emotional bank account this holiday season, buy . . .

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1. Something intimate. Take note if your partner voices his wish list for Christmas. If he cares enough to say what he actually wants, paying attention to that will make him feel valued and understood. If he doesn't have a Christmas wish, try to find something that will have special meaning between the two of you. Still have those Angels tickets from your

first date? Frame them!

You can also make a gift meaningful by giving to something your partner cares about. For example, many celebrities, like Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, care deeply about charitable causes and prefer donations to their favorite charities to extravagant gifts.

2. Something valuable. Take this relatively. If you want to take your relationship to the next level, give your partner something that says, "You are so valuable to me, I would sacrifice anything to have you in my life." That's what women hear when their boyfriends buy them expensive jewelry or spend all day helping them cook. It's not the money or the time, exactly—it's the fact that someone would sacrifice to give them something beautiful or meaningful. You don't have to be like Nick Cannon and buy your significant other a \$400,000 Rolls-Royce Phantom or pull a Jude Law and buy your love a \$200,000 diamond-and-sapphire ring, but it should be better than the pack of bubble gum my friend got from her boyfriend one year.

If you're like me, gift giving is a nail-biting phenomenon. That said, if you give your partner something meaningful and valuable, you can move that relationship dial to the next level. Then again, you could always take your chances and buy a pair of two-person mittens that Chelsea Handler and Chuy are sporting this year!

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