

No-Hassle Holidays: A Fun and Easy Way to Give Gifts

Christmas, like Superman, is approaching “faster than a speeding bullet,” and some of us suddenly find ourselves in need of last-minute gifts. Maybe we forgot to buy Aunt Sarah a present. Maybe we just remembered that we are the Secret Santa for Joe at the office party. Or maybe we goofed up big time and neglected to get our grown children something besides a check.

What to do?

For my four children, all grown, all married, all with children – 20 living grandchildren in all – I decided a few years ago that giving individual gifts was out of the question. First, my budget wouldn't allow for that course of action. Second, I lacked the stamina and the wherewithal to try and select that many gifts. Third...well, third, I decided to take the easy way out.

Here's how it works.

First, I purchase some holiday gift bags, large and small, usually at Dollar Tree. While at Dollar Tree, where everything costs a dollar, I wander around the store looking for items to put in the bag. This year I bought hair ties for granddaughters all bound together and made to look like gigantic lollypops, a scented candle for each bag, various Christmas candies, jars of nuts, cookies, stickers for some of the kids, calendars, and other items.

My next stop was our local grocery store, where I added to this collection: special teas and coffees, granola bars, veggie straws, chewing gum, and more. Before presenting the gift bags to each family, I'll use a smaller bag to house a couple of nice cheeses, crackers, miniature oranges, and a bottle of champagne for the adults and a bottle of sparkling cider – or two, for the larger families. Put a card on top and I'm done. The kids love digging through the treats, and the

adults can enjoy Brie and champagne on New Year's Eve.

Using the same approach, we can make specialty gift bags. Aunt Sarah has two cats, Cristobel and Jo-Jo, and dotes on them as if they were her children. For her little tribe, we grab a small gift bag, head for our local pet store, and hit the cat aisle, where we buy catnip, toy mice, edible treats, nutritious foods, bowls for eating and drinking, and a cat calendar for Aunt Sarah.

Joe at the office is a bruiser, 6'2", 180 lbs., and in terrific shape. But when we ask around, we discover his greatest joy in life is reading and literature.

So what do we do?

Here is what we don't do. We don't give him a book.

Joe may have already read that book. Worse, he may dislike the subject or the author.

No – here we have a couple of choices.

First, we can give Joe a gift card from a local bookshop. If we don't have a bookshop in our vicinity, we give him an Amazon gift card. (Readers, I operated a bookshop for 20 years. Please shop local if you can.) When we present Joe with the card, we are giving him that opportunity treasured by all bibliophiles: to search out and buy the book he wants to read. For years, when my kids asked me what I wanted for Christmas, I'd ask for a bookshop gift card. They thought it was impersonal; I thought it was grand.

But suppose you want something more personal than a gift card. Perhaps you find Joe attractive. Perhaps you want him to know that some thought went into your gift. Perhaps you just object to gift cards.

Back we go to the holiday gift bags.

Visit that local bookshop, but skip the books. Look instead at the knick-knacks they have for lit-lovers like Joe: coffee cups with literary quotations, calendars, plaques, journals, and so on. Fill a gift bag with such trinkets. If the store doesn't have what you want, go online to Amazon or to such sites as "the [Literary Gift Company](#)," and have them ship you everything from socks to umbrellas, all with a literary theme.

Throw in some nice tea or coffee, and you've done your job. Joe will be a happy man.

One last tip: stock up on boxes of tea, various edible treats, a few bottles of reasonably priced wine, some cheese and crackers, and a few gift bags, just in case you've forgotten someone in your gift giving. If you have all the bases covered, then you can enjoy these gifts yourself through the New Year.

So there you have it. No wrapping, no worrying, no fuss. Just fun.

Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, and Happy New Year to all!

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