

## Q&A Column

Author: Mark Swartz, MBA, M.Ed.

**Email Subject Line: Holiday Gift Giving At Work**

[workopolis.com EN home page](#)

**Headline : Strategies for Holiday Gift Giving at Work**

### Summary:

Question: My co-worker spent a fortune this season on presents for people at work. Now I'm worried she'll have an advantage. How do I compete?

[Landing Page copy](#)

**Headline : Strategies for Holiday Gift Giving at Work**

**Dear Mark,**

Question: I overheard a co-worker saying she'd spent a fortune on presents for people at work this season. She figured it would "boost her profile," especially with the boss. I also want to make an impression this year by giving the people at work gifts they'll really appreciate and remember me for, but I don't have a lot of extra money. Is there a way to compete without breaking the bank?

Rosmeary V., Charlestown, P.E.I.

**Dear Rosemary,**

Fear not, as expensive presents do not guarantee you'll be viewed favourably. In fact your co-worker's strategy could backfire. The people she's exchanging gifts with may feel guilty if they spent considerably less than her. Or they might see through her largesse and resent being manipulated.

Giving gifts at work is an area where most people lack expertise: a survey conducted by Harris Interactive for Office Depot Inc. found that, while nearly one in two people plan on buying a holiday gift for at least one business associate this year, 90 percent "are baffled about the etiquette associated with workplace gift-swapping."

So here are some generally accepted guidelines to help sort things out:

- Follow the customs and policies of your particular workplace. If you're not sure what they are, ask around. And check to see if there are published rules about gift giving. Some places restrict the type and maximum dollar value—or tell you who can give to whom. A few even ban workplace gift exchanges outright, in part to prevent the excesses your co-worker is planning.

- Choose *who* you give a gift to wisely. One approach is to target only those whose efforts you've appreciated most throughout the year. Then arrange it so you give the gift in private if possible (outside of work if necessary). This will minimize potential hard feelings from any folks you leave out.
- Avoid controversial presents. Tempted to buy that new guy in marketing something flashy to adorn his fabulous physique? Figuring on getting everyone those cutesey coffee mugs with a stunning Christmas motif? Think twice before you plunk down your credit card. Conservative and secular is the way to go so as not to inadvertently offend. (Same goes for the wrapping).
- Spend modestly and customize if you can. The better you know someone, the more you can choose a reasonably priced gift you're confident they'll appreciate.

Remember that in multi-cultural Canada the reasons for gifting work-wise at this time of year are to celebrate your group's accomplishments, recognize your colleagues in a small but meaningful way, and improve overall comeraderie. Keep these guidelines in mind and your pretty much sure to please.

---



*Mark Swartz, MBA, M.Ed., is a [speaker](#), [career coach](#) and [author](#). He can be reached via his website, [www.careeractivist.com](http://www.careeractivist.com). The above article may contain material not included in the edited version.*

© Mark Swartz, 2003, 2007. All Rights Reserved. No part of this article may be reproduced, republished or redistributed without the prior written consent of the copyright holder. See [Reprint Policy](#) on [www.careeractivist.com](http://www.careeractivist.com) for details. Not-For-Profits exempted and may use the article in part or in full without contacting me - but please do, and kindly credit me as shown in the [Reprint Policy](#).