

'Tis the Season to Give Thanks, not just Gifts'

Rita's Career Corner ...With Rita B. Allen

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Each year as we approach the holidays and the end of the year, we all make a list of all the people we would like to thank and show our appreciation for their work and/or support they have shown us. This time of year is a good time to reflect upon our accomplishments, be thankful for and celebrate our own talents. It is equally important to show gratitude to others who have helped us do so. Not just a thank you but truly and selflessly acknowledging the role someone has had in your success and expressing gratitude. Putting other people's interest's front and center and reaching out to be of service, initiating without being asked. Most importantly, let's make this a practice that we engage in throughout the year and not only at the end of the year. When you think of gift giving, be creative and include the intangible options that can have more impact than a box of chocolates or a gift card. The old saying, "It's the thought that counts" is actually quite true if and when we are genuine and it truly comes from the heart with much thought.

Sincerity and authenticity in showing support and collaboration to express your appreciation is essential. *Fast Company published an article by Howard Jacobson in November of 2011 titled, "Gratitude as a Business Strategy"* and focused on this very topic. It discussed how people do a lot more complaining than showing gratitude focusing on what's wrong rather than all the things that are good. It's easier to jump all over something that doesn't go the way we expected yet we take for granted when things fall right into place as we intended. It went on to describe how so many people from all different professions suffer from 'Gratitude Deficit Disorder' and even referred to it as "a global epidemic" and challenged readers to "make a list of people you are sincerely grateful towards and create an action plan to communicate your thanks, with no hidden agenda" which inspired me to come up with my own which I'd like to share with you.

Three Ways to Say Thank You and Express Gratitude

1. Send a personal hand written note articulating how they played a role in making a difference to help me fill a specific need; taking time to include anecdotes, reflections and learnings that display the mark they left on me and/or the situation. In our current technological world of heavy electronic communications and social media vehicles, a personal hand written note not only stands out but is truly memorable! It makes the person feels special and personalizes the message.

2. Initiate an act of kindness to address a specific need or interest of the individual who made a difference for me such as: introducing them to a colleague in my network who could be a strong resource; invite them to a topical and relevant program or event; forward an article or link. Think of each person individually; identify their uniqueness and what's most important to them. Make it real for each person, show that you truly care about their needs and personalize it.
3. Maintain an on-going relationship and dialogue on a long term basis - don't stop after doing the first two but continue to stay in touch, follow up and show interest in their needs and challenges as well as celebrating their successes. Do so in a way that is intentional and planful. Think of ways to stay connected all year and initiate ways to help throughout the year. Relationships are long term and expressing gratitude is a process of establishing and enhancing trust so that it is deeper than a one-time thank you but more of an on-going give and take that will naturally result in meaningful and trusting relationships.

There were several relevant quotes in Howard Jacobson's Fast Company article that spoke volumes to me and the following one was my favorite...

"Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it."

--- William Arthur Ward

The holidays are about being grateful for all that we have and rejoicing in thankfulness. As we get ready to wrap up another year and begin a new one, let's be thankful throughout the entire year. Be grateful for our strengths, leverage our talents, and rejoice in thankfulness every day of our career. Make time to acknowledge others and express gratitude to them, give them recognition and praise. Thank others who played a role and make a difference in their lives. Make them feel special in a way that lets them know how their actions transformed your life or career. The most rewarding feeling is to know that your actions impacted someone's direction, livelihood, decisions, performance, energy, self-esteem, and/or several other factors. Our words and actions are powerful and meaningful. So...as you continue to create your list this year, be creative and generous with your giving thanks and expressions of gratitude!

Ask Rita...

Question: Every year I buy a supply of gift cards to pass out to my staff, colleagues, manager as well as service providers who have helped me throughout the year. It has started to feel like an act and a ritual which has made me sit back to ask myself if it is really sending my intended message which is to acknowledge the people whom I really feel blessed to have in my life rather than a mass distribution of gifts to everyone. I'd like to stop this cycle but won't I offend people?

Answer: I commend you for stepping back and reflecting on your intent and whether or not it is being conveyed. Gift giving has become very ritualistic and continues to be more so unless we make the choice to do exactly what you have concluded. First, identify who the people are that you value and would like to express gratitude which, by the way, may be different each year. Second, personalize the way that you show your thankfulness and gratitude. Do something for each person that meets their individual needs and interests. It could be inviting them to a professional association they have been thinking of joining or giving them a relevant book with a personalized note inside letting them know how they have made a difference in your life or taking over one of their tasks during a floater holiday so they can take the day off with their children. Last, and most importantly, I'd suggest thinking of it as starting new traditions and having conversations with people in that spirit. Not only will it not offend people but I'll bet

they'll appreciate it and join you! Enjoy the process of truly giving thanks and expressing gratitude which is most rewarding!

Send your questions to: [Rita B. Allen](#)

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