



A More Ethical Way to Handle Token Gifts at Work

Do you own the organisation you work in? **No?**

Does your employer allow the receipt and retention of token gifts at work? **Yes?**

Would you be given this gift if you no longer worked for your employer? **No, or unlikely?**

Then this guide to the handling of even 'token gifts' at work is for you!

● Food for thought:

If a policy says you **MAY** do something, it does not say you **MUST** do something.

If a policy says you **MAY** do something, the ethical responsibility for your decision transfers to you!

For the ethical employee,

there can be a world of difference between **ALLOWED TO DO** and **OUGHT TO DO**.

They understand that a 'may do' policy is not an 'ethics-free pass'.



Remember - never accept a gift that contravenes your employer's policy.

Firstly, you are in the best position to assess the gift giver's intention.

Is it to make you feel beholden to them? Are they hoping that giving you the gift will help them achieve a preferential advantage of some kind? Might accepting make you feel inclined or obliged to reciprocate the 'favour' with a 'favour' that would put them at some kind of unfair advantage?

If you answer yes to any of these questions, you should not accept the gift.



If, having applied your mind, you are confident that the gift has no implied strings attached and you decide to accept the gift, your next challenge is this:

Put the gift to work –AT WORK.
HOW?



IF YOU DECIDE IT'S OK TO ACCEPT THE GIFT, HOW YOU ACCEPT THE GIFT MATTERS.

In the way you thank your gift giver, be sure to elevate the ethical tone of your business relationship. How?

Let them know that no gifts are expected and that going forward they should be confident that you will serve them equally – gifts or no gifts. It's the value and performance of the supplier that will determine the longevity of the relationship.

"Our practice is to share such gifts for business use fairly within our team. The calendar has been put up in our meeting room/been put to use as a lucky draw prize for those participating in a suggestion scheme aimed at reducing our carbon footprint."

"Thank you so much for the kind gift of the (branded notebook/desk calendar/wall calendar/diary). I will find it useful in the course of my work."

"Please be assured that we have no expectation of such gifts going forward and our continued association will always be based on the best interests of our business."

"The gifts we receive are auctioned internally and the money raised is donated to charity..."

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Ideas for putting that gift to work –AT WORK

Naomi loves notebooks, even those that are branded with the logo of the auditors or employee benefits administrators she routinely deals with. She explains her approach:



“I’m more comfortable accepting a notebook from a major, long-term supplier than I am from an occasional or small supplier. I know that the cost of the gift is not going to have a material impact on what the supplier charges for their service. What’s more, in this case both parties understand that a branded stationery item is not going to influence the contract renewal process. I use the notebooks for meeting note-taking and writing action lists at work, and they help me save on the office stationery budget. But if I need a notebook for personal use, I buy it myself.”

Clearly her approach is above reproach. But should Naomi be the one who keeps and uses the notebook, even it is at work, for work?

What if, in truth, you are not the only or most significant contributor to that great service that customer is wanting to recognise?

Rather than allow perceived unfairness to fester in the minds of those who are not in the front line when it comes to gifting, pass the gift on to them as an acknowledgement of their contribution.

Imagine the impact on that backroom team when you arrive with the box of chocolates and announce:

“I received this, but I know that it was your work that was pivotal to the service we gave the client, and so I want you to have it”.

At no cost to you or the organisation, you are contributing to fairness in its reward and recognition practices.



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But there is yet another consideration: could the gift be deployed to reduce your employer's costs?

As Prashan, a procurement manager told me,

"There's a level of absurdity to the fact that, each December, some teams are placing purchase orders for diaries while some individuals are allowing multiple diaries they have received as gifts to pile up on their desks."



You get the idea.

Either put that calendar up in a meeting room to benefit everyone in the team, or if not needed, give it to someone in the team who deserves and needs it more than you. Share the chocolates over a quick tea, for a morale-boosting effect.

GET CREATIVE.

**THE MORE VALUE YOU
CAN DELIVER VIA THAT
FREE GIFT, THE BETTER.**



Here's another option.

Contribute the gift for use in lucky draws designed to encourage employee participation in organisational initiatives – think wellness events, suggestion schemes, completing that dreaded online anti-corruption learning programme.

You, your colleagues and the company leading a life of plenty? How about passing the gift on to a non-profit stakeholder that serves the community in which your business operates?

Ronald, who spends much of his free time doing community work, describes his annual 'mission' like this:



"Each year, in late December / early January, I ask my colleagues and friends to pass on any gifts suitable for office use that are surplus to their needs. I then distribute these to those who don't have the advantage of working in a business with an adequate stationery budget. Consider the many community-based organisations whose employees have to buy their own workplace requisites. It's in all our interests that the people serving society in these organisations are supported."

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Finally, even if your policy does not require it, make a practice of advising your reporting manager that you have accepted a gift/s, regardless of their token value, and detail your method of deployment. Send them a simple email for noting, and keep it as your own record.

Even if your boss and your colleagues have not applied their mind to the many ethical questions that arise when they accept token gifts, and even if a few of them brand you as spoilsport, you could just spark an impactful, ethical movement in your workplace. You never know, one of them may pass a gift they receive on to you!

Whatever you do, remember to put that token gift to work – AT WORK.

What you can be sure of is that the value you will deliver, both for your own reputation and for the benefit of the organisation, will far exceed the value of the token gift. **It may even be priceless.**



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