



## The Art and Science of Giving

December is associated with several holidays that involve gift-giving. This issue of MM will present examples of gifting traditions worldwide, explore gift-giving from different perspectives, and share alternative gift ideas.

**Giving Traditions Around the World.** Giving gifts is as old as humanity and as diverse as the cultures in which it is practiced.

- In a 2020 blog post, "[The History of Gift Giving](#)," Katie Whittingham recounts examples of gift-giving traditions in several ancient civilizations and cultures. Examples include burying gifts with the deceased in Ancient Egypt, Alaskan whalers gifting large portions of their catch to fellow tribe members to gain respect, and hanging gifts from a clothesline for guests to choose at children's birthday parties in Russia.
- Some gift-giving traditions have certain rules to follow, such as giving an odd or even number of items or avoiding a certain color or flower to prevent passing misfortune onto the recipient. Learn more about these gifting "rules" in [Forty Unique Gift Giving Traditions Around the World](#).

**Understanding Gift Giving.** We can better understand gift-giving by exploring the practice through various lenses, including economics, psychology, anthropology, and philosophy.

- In his 1967 essay, [The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies](#), French anthropologist and sociologist Marcel Mauss explored gift-giving in primitive societies. He presented three things that motivate giving: the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to repay. These obligations could be influenced by religious or ceremonial traditions, the need to maintain status, or the pursuit of peace between groups.
- Psychology research Gift giving has been associated with happiness. While happiness tends to subside after most events that bring us joy, giving to others, particularly repeated giving, seems to be an exception. Read more about the connection between joy and giving in this 2018 article, "[The Joy of Giving Lasts Longer than the Joy of Getting](#)."
- The connection between giving and happiness might be clear, but choosing a gift isn't always simple. Jennifer Rothschild, professor of philosophy at the University of Florida, shares a formula for choosing the ideal gift in her TED Talk, "[How to Give a Good Gift](#)." Rothschild explains that gift-giving involves a unified approach that considers the giver's intention, the gifted object, and the effect of the recipient. When these three elements work together, it creates an optimal gifting experience.

**Alternative Gift Ideas.** The current supply chain backlogs have caused panic about whether consumers will receive items in time for the holidays. In addition to homemade gifts and buying

from local small businesses, the alternative gift ideas below not only circumvent the shipping problem but also reduce waste.

- *The Gift of Empowerment.* Donating to a cause that's important to a loved one or on their behalf is one way to give the gift of charity. Organizations like [Kiva](#) offer gift certificates as small as \$25 that recipients can use to crowdfund microfinancing loans (some with 0% interest) to support entrepreneur projects worldwide. You can choose projects by location, type of business, business attributes, and gender by searching the database [here](#).
- *Digital Gifts.* Widespread internet access allows us to not only give greetings cards and monetary gifts digitally, other options such as music or streaming service subscriptions (e.g., Netflix or Spotify), digital versions of magazines, custom digital artwork, online classes to learn a new hobby or skill (e.g., Craftsy or Master Class), or a personal message from a favorite celebrity (e.g., Cameo).
- *The White Elephant Gift.* The [white elephant gift party](#) is a modern event where participants exchange impractical or unusual gifts for fun and entertainment; however, the [white elephant gift can be traced to ancient Southeast Asia](#) and involves a white elephant. White elephants were rare and admirable signs of strength but were otherwise useless. If a king or ruler gifted a white elephant, it signified that he was displeased with someone, and such a gift would be burdensome to the recipient. While the modern white elephant gifts are not meant to be taken seriously, you can avoid wasteful spending by setting a cost limit, allowing participants to *voluntarily* swap gifts, or using a practical theme (e.g., a day at the office).
- *Regifting.* [While some would consider it rude to gift something that was gifted to you, regifting is another way to avoid waste by sharing an unused or unwanted item with someone who would find it useful. Read these Seven simple rules for regifting](#) in Money Market International's "Blogging for Change." And the best gift of all—regifting comes with zero cost.

*May we avoid blaming or bias based on our circumstance and continue to be grateful for the gifts of the global community.*

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December 2021