

Hey boss, did you get my gift?

The ethics policies of many companies detail when and under what circumstances it is proper for any of their employees to accept a gift from a customer or a supplier.

Fewer ethics statements consider if it is ever appropriate for the owner, a supervisor or a boss to expect or accept a gift from an employee of the company, whether it be for Christmas, a birthday, or any other occasion. Only some see this as an ethical issue, but those who insist that it is say that gifts under those circumstances should not be expected, offered or accepted, and to do otherwise would be unethical.

Here are possible issues:

- (a) Co-workers could misinterpret holiday generosity as an effort to get ahead with the boss, and for that matter, the boss could have the same impression.
- (b) Some question people vying for the boss' favor by everyone trying to outspend the other in order to get more attention and possible awards.
- (c) Also, there is a kind of slippery slope concern: Once a worker starts giving the boss something, even something small, the door is open to wanting to attract the boss' attention and favor by spending more money, and making more of a big deal over a holiday present.

Still, there seem to be ways to address this issue, especially in a small company or perhaps in a small section of a larger company: In addition to having a written rule prohibiting or limiting such gifts, a group gift from the employees would eliminate the risk that employees will compete to give the best gift. If that doesn't work, and somehow gifts are part of the culture of the business, requiring gifts costing no more than a specified amount might help. Certainly, a gift costing a small amount would not likely be misinterpreted. A better idea would be for the employees to pool the group resources to present the opportunity of everyone being involved.

But it is really up to the boss or the supervisor to settle the issue so as not to create an ethical issue, or for that matter an emotional nightmare. One way to avoid conflict might be to get everyone to pass up the exchange of gifts and to pool their money to do something, as a group, to benefit folks who are in need.

A gift is sometimes intended as a thank you for something done by the boss worthy of appreciation. A thank-you note can do the same and avoid unwanted problems.

Major issues are often born out of issues that start small and grow irretrievably bigger. This could be one of them, and not necessarily just in December.