



It's a Wrap!

The Art of Meaningful Gift-Giving in 5 Easy Steps

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Your holiday gift list is as long as your arm, and the notion of fulfilling everyone's wishes is a daunting task. From your boss to your brother-in-law, there are gifts to be purchased, with sincerity, style, and if you're really good—a sale or two. Take heed in knowing that you are not alone in this journey that takes you to the strip mall and beyond the Sunday circular ads. Someone may be struggling right now to find the perfect gift for you!

While some elevate gift-giving to an art form, it's a skill easily acquired according to gift expert Lorri Noto, president of Gift Presence, a local company providing gift concepts, shopping services and the ever-important wrapped presentation.

"It's really all about listening to the people you care about on your gift list," said Noto. "People get so overwhelmed and don't listen." She advises to pay attention to what the giftee does—do they play sports, collect martini glasses, drink a special brand of coffee, or always wear fabulous accessories?

Giving gifts should be a fun and rewarding experience for the giver and the receiver. If you follow these five easy steps, you can give meaningful presents and gain memorable moments, too. With a little expert guidance, this is bound to be your best holiday under wraps.

GIVE BECAUSE YOU WANT TO.

When you think of gift-giving as an obligation, it automatically becomes a chore. While the mass merchants remind us that every holiday is a gifting opportunity, if you give because you want to, it's rewarding all around.

In today's multi-tasking world, a great gift idea often slips to the bottom of the list and falls off the page. You may have a fabulous idea for someone special, but there are not enough hours in the day to get it done. It's okay to hire a little behind the scenes help to execute your idea. In fact, Noto's business exists solely for busy people.

"We work with time conscious professionals and



LORRI NOTO, PRESIDENT OF GIFT PRESENCE

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corporations who care very much about the recipient, but don't have the time to make it happen."

LISTEN UP AND WRITE IT DOWN.

According to Noto, communication is key. "I gift all year long," said Noto. And not because it's her day job, but in her personal life she says that when she hears a friend or family member mention something they like—for example a book or a specialty item—she writes it down and then comes back to the list when the occasion presents itself.

Unless you were blessed with an incredible memory, you'll be thankful you took notes throughout the year. Use the memo page on your Blackberry or keep a running tab in a small notebook. That way, if your client or a friend mentions a charity that they support while golfing in the heat of the summer, you can refer back to your list when winter rolls around. When it comes time to present them with a holiday

gift of a charitable donation to their favorite cause, it becomes a gift that you both will feel good about.

GIVE SOMETHING INDULGENT.

There is nothing more satisfying than giving—or receiving—a gift of pure luxury and self indulgence.

"Whether you're spending \$25 or \$2500, you can give a thoughtful gift," said Noto. "What you want is that smile, that warm fuzzy feeling."

Sometimes it's as simple as giving the gift of time. Noto had a client who needed assistance with a present for his wife. With a background in retail and staffing, Noto asked a lot of questions, and the one thing that resonated was the fact that his wife felt overwhelmed. "Sometimes a great gift is solving a problem," she said. "So we took five nightmare tasks on her list and fulfilled them—things that helped relieve the pressure and ultimately brought her joy."

Often times the things we wouldn't buy ourselves involve an experience—a great gift—shift away from a

desperate product purchase for the person who has everything. Some great websites to jumpstart your creativity include excitations.com and gifts.com. Both offer point and click options from fly fishing to a fighter pilot experience. You can buy direct or browse for ideas and localize them right here in Charlotte. For example, you can purchase a whitewater rafting package in Colorado from gifts.com, or call the U.S. National Whitewater Rafting Center in Charlotte and book a private raft for six right here in your hometown.

INVEST TIME TO WRITE A NOTE WITH YOUR GIFT.

There is nothing like a handwritten card attached to a beautifully wrapped package to touch the recipient in a meaningful way. Maybe your gift was purchased while on vacation—so tell them where you bought it and why it reminded you of them.

Perhaps your gift includes multiple items and has a story to tell, like the one that Noto put together for

a retiring executive around the theme of the movie, "The Bucket List." The presentation included a tool chest, a scrabble game, a necktie and scissors, coffee and pajamas—pieces to connect and support the story related to the movie and the giftee's pending retirement.

"We start with a main idea and add 'connector' pieces that pull a story together," said Noto. Then we write a signature story to tie the package together, talking about the integral themes—retiring, relaxing, cutting ties with work and enjoying life.

"When we gift for people we care about, we connect the dots."

PRESENT YOUR GIFT WELL.

Your presentation is a reflection of your personal style, so venture beyond the reliable gift bag and get creative. When you take the extra effort to make your gift look as beautiful as the sentiment it represents, you'll get a great reaction every time.

Gifts cards, one of the most popular items on today's shopping lists, are a great example of something that requires a little dressing-up. Last holiday, consumers spent \$26.3 billion dollars on gift cards, according to the National Retail Federation, a number expected to grow in 2008.

Since this small piece of plastic doesn't particularly convey a "wow" factor, think about adding visual layers. Noto recommends supplementing product items within the same category to create a multiple-item gift with visual presence, which she insists can be accomplished at all price points.

"If you only have 50 dollars to spend and want to give your teenager a movie gift card so they can go with their friends, add fun things to round out the gift and give it some pizzazz," said Noto. "You could ask the theater where you buy the card if they would give you a big popcorn bucket and then fill it with candy or their favorite snacks and tuck the gift card inside."

Planning a trip to Italy? A journey that your recipient has dreamed about is sure to be received with enthusiasm, but lacks presentation in a white envelope. Consider adding a beautiful globe, articles of clothing, and an antique suitcase, advises Noto.

During the holiday season, many businesses give gifts to their employees and clients to say thanks—in the form of a gift or bonus check. "If employers would take that extra step to package the gift, I'm sure they would be surprised at the reaction—especially at a time in the economy when retention is key," said Noto. *

For more information call 704.321.0336 or visit www.giftpresence.com.

Gifts that Give

HOW WE CAN HELP THOSE IN NEED
THIS HOLIDAY SEASON AND ALL THE YEAR THROUGH

COMPILED BY HEIDI BILLOTTO

CHARLOTTE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A VERY GIVING CITY, and this is a giving time of the year. If you are looking for a way to help those less fortunate than yourself during this season of giving, here are some suggestions of how you can help.

THE SECOND HARVEST FOOD BANK OF METROLINA is located on Spratt Street in Uptown Charlotte. The bank is always looking for donations of healthy non-perishable foods like canned vegetables, juices and baby formula, and for every dollar you donate, the food bank can provide one client with a meal. Make donations to Second Harvest Food Bank of Metrolina, 500-B Spratt Street, Charlotte, NC 28206 or call 704.376.1785 for more information.

THE CHARLOTTE RESCUE MISSION depends totally on private donations, receiving no state, federal or United Way funding. The ninety-day program provides shelter, counseling, rehabilitation and job opportunities for drug and alcohol addicted clients. Charlotte Rescue Mission's success rate continues to be well above the national average. Currently the Mission serves about 450 meals a day. While CRM is always in need of monetary donations, it also accepts in-kind donations such as clothes, vehicles, toiletry items, and miscellaneous household items. The Mission is in need of volunteers, including tutors, data entry and office help, and groups to prepare and serve meals. The Mission is in need of volunteers as well as groups to prepare and serve meals. For information call 704.334.4635. Send donations to Charlotte Rescue Mission, P.O. Box 33000, Charlotte, NC 28233 or online at www.charlotterescuemission.org

MAKE-A WISH grants the wishes of children with life-threatening medical conditions. The average wish granted to children requesting help

from the Make-A-Wish Foundation is \$6,000 per child, so every donation helps. 78 cents of every dollar donated goes directly to granting wishes. To donate or to find out other ways to help make a child's wish come true, visit the Make-A-Wish Foundation of Central and Western North Carolina online at www.ncwish.org or call the office at 1.877.677.WISH (9474).

THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF CHARLOTTE takes in approximately 80 homeless animals each month. It is a safe haven for abandoned animals and is working to help create a world where there are no more homeless and unwanted animals. As a "space available shelter," the policy is that all animals at the Humane Society are offered the opportunity of a safe and loving home. The adoption center at 704.377.0534 is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mon-Sat. and the spay/neuter clinic at 704.333.4130 is open Monday-Friday by appointment.

A \$25 donation will feed four hungry kittens for one week; \$75 will pay for the surgery to spay or neuter one homeless animal; and \$250 will provide feline leukemia and AIDS testing for 30 adoptable cats to insure a disease-free future. To make a contribution: contact the Humane Society of Charlotte at 2700 Tommey Avenue, Charlotte, NC 28203 or visit www.clthumane.org.

LOAVES & FISHES provides a week's worth of nutritious groceries to individuals and families in crisis through a network of 16 emergency food pantries in Mecklenburg County. To organize a food drive at your work or congregation, call 704.523.4333 or visit the website for step by step instructions. Each pound of food collected represents one meal for a hungry person. Send donations to Loaves & Fishes, P. O. Box 11234, Charlotte, NC 28220-1234 or for more information visit www.loavesandfishes.org.