THE UNWANTED GIFT: SKILLFUL RESPONSES

By Chick Moorman and Thomas Haller

It might be a gift from your spouse. I could be one from your boss. Perhaps it will be delivered by Uncle Bill or dropped off by your next door neighbor. Regardless of whom it comes from, chances are you’ll open it again this holiday season. Yes, it’s the dreaded, and often received, unwanted gift.

So there sits Uncle Bill, grinning at you from across the room, waiting for your verbal response to the unwanted gift you’ve just unwrapped. “You’ve got to be kidding me,” are the first words that race through your mind, but you bite your tongue because you prefer to be gracious. You don’t feel like you should be totally honest because, “You just can’t imagine how much I hate this gift,” seems interpersonally inappropriate. You’re next thought is how his gift will make a great Salvation Army donation, but you don’t want to say that aloud either.

So what do you say? How do you retain your integrity without saying exactly how you feel about the unwanted gift? How do you respond with skill and show appreciation even when your mind is filled with, “How could you ever have thought I would like this?”

Below you will find five helpful responses to use when you open the unwanted gift. They will help you respond honestly while displaying tact and interpersonal skill.

1. “I appreciate the time and effort it took to find (create) this.”

You may not appreciate the gift, but you can appreciate the energy it took to find, purchase, and wrap it. Concentrate on what you can appreciate. Let the rest go unspoken.
2. “Thank you for thinking of me. You are always so thoughtful”

Verbally appreciate the thought that went into the gift. Even if you don’t agree with the thought process that connected you with the gift, the giver was thinking of you when they made the purchase. Honor their thoughtfulness.

3. “Your gift is unique. I have never received anything quite like this before.”

Many unwanted gifts are unique. It is probably truthful that you have not received anything like it before. Acknowledge the special nature of the gift even if you detest the contents.

4. “I’d love to hear how you found this. Will you share that with me later?”

There is probably an interesting story behind the unwanted gift that the giver would love to tell. Their story may give you some insight into why they thought that present was appropriate for you in the first place. Listen and learn.

5. “I’m going to have to put some thought into how and where I’m going to use (wear) this.”

Although more of your thought may go into how you are going to dispose of the unwanted gift, it is partially true that you’ll be thinking of how to put it to use. This verbal response communicates that you value the giver enough to think seriously about how and when to use the gift.

The responses above can be used with most unwanted gifts. Pick a couple of your favorites and memorize them. You’ll then be ready to respond to the unwanted gift with skill and appreciation.

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