

Case Study 11:

To Gift or Not to Gift

Background

ATZ Distribution Limited's social committee (responsible for planning seasonal social events for staff) recently received emails from some staff members indicating concerns about the rising expense of the traditional gift exchange. While each person draws someone else's name for whom they will buy a gift—and are responsible for only one gift for that person—some staff have been buying increasingly expensive gifts, while others cannot afford to participate when they have so many other expenses during the holiday season within their own households.

Recently, two of the managers of the company returned from a business trip in South Africa where they were investigating new sources of raw materials, and they were very moved by a day trip they took to visit an AIDS centre for children and women. They made a presentation in September open to anyone interested, and now many people are talking about how they can help.

As a result of the interest and discussion, the social committee proposes to replace the gift exchange with a donation to a development project in South Africa.

Current Situation

Meryem Budak is a member of ATZ's social committee and has agreed to write a proposal on behalf of the social committee to all staff to see if they will endorse the social committee's donation plan in lieu of the gift exchange tradition.

The Problem

While the two managers' presentation on their visit to the South African AIDS centre generated much discussion about how to help the organization, the presentation also prompted a lot of discussion about Canadian social justice issues, such as food insecurity in many households. Some staff have asserted that if any donations are to be made to a not-for-profit organization, the company and staff should donate to a Canadian agency before one in South Africa. Meryem also knows that the social committee's proposal to end the gift exchange will be opposed by several people who like the tradition and really enjoy the camaraderie generated when gifts are handed around at the annual seasonal celebration.

Meryem must write persuasively to convince those potentially opposed to the social committee's proposal. She has the social committee's blessing to offer some minor alterations to the proposal if Meryem thinks this will get everyone to endorse the donation to the AIDS organization.

Exhibit A
Proposal for a new seasonal gift giving tradition

To: All management and staff
From: Meryem Budak, Social Committee
Date: October 15, 2021
Subject: Proposal for a new seasonal gift giving tradition

As you know, the holiday season is just about upon us, and your social committee is starting to plan the usual (yet annually unique!) fun and festive dinner and dance. We have confirmed the venue—the Rialto—and are pleased that the Jack Flack Jazz Trio will provide live, seasonal music throughout dinner and for our dance. We're firming up meal and beverage details, but we are working on a menu that will accommodate everyone's dietary restrictions while still being delicious.

Several of you have approached or emailed members of the social committee to express your concerns about the traditional holiday gift exchange, asking us to reconsider what we do annually to recognize the season of giving. Some of us have been spending more than agreed to on gifts that we exchange after our name draw in November, while others are finding it difficult to keep up with equally expensive gifts. The disparity inherent in what some can and do spend on gifts is clearly a concern we must address—we don't want our seasonal celebration to be a source of stress for any member of staff.

Your social committee has discussed several options to replace the gift exchange. Some staff have expressed interest in donating to the South African AIDS organization Johannes Smit and Evelyn Jones visited in August. Others would rather we donate in lieu of gifts to a Canadian social agency, such as a local food bank addressing food insecurity issues. Still others are adamant that we do not scrap the traditional gift exchange.

Following much discussion of all feedback from staff, we have determined the best course of action is to suggest everyone donate the same amount they would spend on a gift. Individuals can donate whatever they can afford; the company will match our donations dollar for dollar. We will then make a donation on behalf of our entire company to the South African AIDS organization. We have chosen the AIDS organization because the majority of you have indicated this is what you want to do.

In making this change, we will eliminate the concerns of many who can't afford to buy expensive gifts in the gift exchange. Donations will be confidential, so no one else will know what you donated. We will announce what we have collected and what the company has matched at our seasonal party.

We hope you will endorse our proposal to replace our traditional gift exchange, in order to make our celebration accessible and comfortable for everyone here at ATZ. Should you have any comments or questions, please contact me at ext. 234 or by email: kbauer@atzltd.ca. You can also approach any social committee member in person, by phone, or by email.

Activities and Discussion

1. Did you notice the first paragraph functions as an indirect introduction to the proposed change in gift giving? Do you think this indirect delivery of information (introducing the proposal—that some may oppose—after delivering good news about the dinner and dance) is a good idea in this proposal? Why or why not?
2. Does the proposal address the preferences of those who want to donate to a local social agency, or those who want to continue with the gift exchange? Is Meryem successful in persuading those people to endorse the proposal? Why or why not?
3. What are the benefits of this proposal for staff? Are these benefits persuasive enough for staff members who might not want to donate to the AIDS organization to change their minds? What benefits might you propose if you were writing this proposal?
4. Meryem had permission from the committee to offer some adjustments to the proposal to obtain endorsement from all staff for the change. She did not offer any adjustments to mollify those who would be opposed to the proposal. What would you offer if you were in her position that might get everyone on board with the proposed change?
5. Rewrite the proposal, keeping in mind the concerns of all staff regarding seasonal gift giving.