



## What Are You putting in Their Stockings This Year

by **Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP**

Last year, I wrote an article entitled "What's Under Your Tree" that turned out to be very popular. The concept was, in a organizational setting, what gifts are we bringing to our co-workers. I'm not talking about physical gifts here, rather I am referring to things like the gift of our time, our attention, recognition, encouragement, and many other intangible gifts that make a huge difference in the relationships between people.

This year I thought of a variant of the same theme around the image of a Christmas Stocking. When I was growing up, we opened the stockings first thing in the morning on Christmas Day. In fact, us kids would be first up, jumping up and down on our parents' bed to make them get up so that we could go down and see what was in our stockings.

Everyone knew that the presents in the stockings were more of an entertainment nature. They were small in value, but they kept us occupied and intrigued during the early morning hours until the adults got ready to open the bigger presents under the tree.

My analogy for things we might put in the stockings of others at work might include the following items:

**Being cheerful toward the other person.** Just because we are having a hard day, that's no reason we have to project negativity onto our co-workers. We can show a positive demeanor in most situations and brighten their day considerably.

**Doing small favors.** Getting a cup of coffee for the other person is a small gesture, but at times it can be a big deal. Sharing office supplies rather than hoarding them would be another example of a small favor. Just saying thank you for anything done by someone else that is helpful to you is a kind gesture that promotes goodwill.

**Do not gossip.** Try to not participate in negative conversations about other people, especially when they are not around to defend themselves. Just remembering the Golden Rule is a good way to prevent negativity from permeating side conversations. If someone is sharing some dirt about another individual simply say, "I would rather not discuss this unless he is here to participate."

**Help lighten the load of the other person.** The habitual time pressure seems to be getting worse each year. Even though you have significant time pressure yourself, there will be opportunities for you to extend a little time to help other people lighten their own load. Those little favors add up to significant goodwill in the long run.

**Put in a good word.** Mentioning something positive about another person to an individual, such as his supervisor, can create a pattern of support that helps people help each other through some of the difficult times. You do not need to go overboard with false flattery or praise; just simply reflect on the good efforts and work by other people. This will serve you in good stead, as they will often return the favor.

**Provide a shoulder to cry on.** People need to vent sometimes just to maintain sanity. If you allow them to get some of the poison out with a rant, it can help lighten their load. This is a delicate area, because it can be a trap if you become the habitual dumping ground for all of the small annoyances of life. You need to find a balance where people view you as being empathetic to their situation but not a time consuming source of hearing confessions.

**Be polite.** Simply extend the common courtesies of a professional atmosphere in every interface, if possible. These are small gestures such as answering email requests promptly, respecting the need for a quiet atmosphere in which to work, or being punctual to meetings or events.

The analogy of a stocking full of gifts at work is all about helping other people in little ways that form an important pattern that improves their working life. Do these things, and people will respond in very positive ways to you.



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