

There's more to regifting than ribbons and wrapping

by Sandi Dolbee

In the Gospel According to Seinfeld, here's how the Christmas story might go: Joseph: Did you see what those strange-looking men gave to little Jesus?

Mary: Yes, dear.

Joseph: What on earth can a baby do with gold, frankincense and myrrh?

Mary: Well, I suppose we could always regift them.

The Word came from a 1995 episode of the "Seinfeld" TV sitcom. Regift: The gift that keeps on giving. And it stuck like gum on a flip-flop.

Its tacky factor is right up there with returning a dress after you wore it to the company Christmas party. Still, more than half of you say you plan to regift this holiday season.

That's according to a survey by Money Management International, a Houston-based network specializing in consumer credit counseling. The company even has a Web site that offers a prize for the best regifting stories (regiftable.com).

Its spin:

1. Everyone is doing it (which reminds me of my mother telling me that if everyone jumped off a bridge, does that mean I should, too?).

2. Times are tough ("you can help keep your holiday spending under control," says one of the company's credit-counseling minions; as opposed to the proverb that says "a good name is more desirable than great riches").

3. Go green (as in recycling your unwanted presents; What Would Al Gore Do?).

Ethicists, those people who get paid to think about good and bad conduct, mostly defend regifting - with some caveats. ProEthics Ltd., a consulting company in Alexandria, Va., and operator of ethicsscoreboard.com, provides some hypothetical mind-sets to help you decide whether you're being naughty or nice.

Ethical:

- "Someone I really care about gave this to me, and I want to give it to you."

- "I'm financially strapped this year, and I just can't afford to give you what I'd like to. But I can give you this wonderful gift, which was given to me."

Not ethical:

- "I don't like this gift I was given at all, but maybe you'll like it more. This way I get rid of something I don't want and get a gift out of the way. It's worth a shot."

- "I want to get credit for giving you a gift, but don't want to spend any time, thought or cash finding something meaningful, considerate or thoughtful, so I just wrapped up this gift that I would throw out anyway, and here it is."

In researching this column, I read about a woman who got a negligee she didn't like at a wedding shower. When she tried to return it, the store manager told her it had been out of production for a few years.

She realized then that it had been regifted from her friend's prior marriage. "Fortunately for me," she wrote, "my friend didn't include the matching panties that were a part of the set. Should I include that in the thank you note?"

There's more to regifting than ribbons and wrapping by Sandi Dolbee