

Office gift fund: Good idea or bad idea?

Question: “Our work group plans to start a “Sunshine Fund” to buy gifts for special occasions, like birthdays, weddings and baby showers. One person wants to post a list showing the dollar amount contributed by each employee, but I think that’s a horrible idea. How can we do this so that people who can’t afford to contribute won’t feel obligated or uncomfortable?” — *Fair-Minded*

Marie’s Answer: Publicizing contribution levels would obviously be a huge mistake, but let me go one step further. Despite your good intentions, I think you should ditch the whole idea. Here’s why:

- Presumably, the purpose of the Sunshine Fund is to enhance team spirit and boost morale, but publicly embarrassing those who have tight budgets will have the opposite effect. If you already know that some people can’t afford to participate, then this clearly cannot be a group activity.
- Buying gifts should not appear to be a job requirement, even for people who are financially comfortable. Close colleagues are always free to give presents privately, just as they would with any other friend.
- Instead of soliciting payments for obligatory gifts, mark special events with group celebrations. For example, everyone could buy funny cards or split the cost of a cake. The goal is to recognize an important moment in someone’s life, not pile on the loot.
- For occasions when a collective gift seems appropriate, everyone should agree on an affordable purchase. Unless this is an unusually greedy group, the sentiment behind the present will be valued more than the cost.