

Office etiquette: Sign gift card from "all" or only contributors sign?

Question: "We took a collection to buy gifts for our managers, thanking them for contributing to a celebration they funded out of their own pockets. Only some of the people in our department contributed because some couldn't afford it, and others just simply refused. What is the proper etiquette for signing the card? Do I have the contributors sign, or should I sign on behalf of the department? I don't want to leave out the people who couldn't afford it, but I don't want those who refused to give to get credit, especially since those who did give, gave substantially." — *Amanda*

Lynn Kos April 27, 2017 at 1:59 pm

It often happens that only a few people contribute to a group gift. That's life. If you must, send a thank you note to those that kindly contributed to the gift and be fully aware of your reason(s) for sending such a note. Make certain YOUR actions elevate others by celebrating the reason for the gift giving, not the gift given.

Kym August 31, 2016 at 8:24 am

I just spearheaded a collection for a coworker who is getting married in a couple of weeks. We have an office population of 68, 28 of whom contributed. From those 28 we were to raise \$500 and get the cookware set the bride had on her gift registry. I'm sorry but I am not inclined to include the other 40 people on the card. Yes, I am sure some did not contribute due to finances but I had people give as little as \$5. It is absolutely the thought that counts. I have carried this group before but not this time.

anon August 24, 2016 at 3:01 pm

The poor admin (Me!) always gets stuck with making up for the "extra" because expected people did not give. Its nice how the one that makes the lowest has to pay the most. I'm done with these group gifts.

Rose April 24, 2009 at 12:35 pm

I agree that a gift given from a department should include everyone, even though some of the people did not contribute. I have this problem also, when someone decides to give a thank you gift to our director, I am stuck with trying to collect the money for the gift. I have sent an e-mail to everyone with the amount of the gift and everyone's portion, but still there are those one's that don't contribute or acknowledge even receiving the e-

mail; even thought I get an e-mail receipt. So I don't even worry anymore about this, I just sign from the department and whoever comes up with the idea of the gift, gets stuck with the rest of the payment. What needs to be done is get everyone together and see if they want to contribute before getting the gift.

Fellow Admin Asst April 20, 2009 at 2:50 pm

It's understandable to only want those that contributed to sign. There are A LOT of petty people in the workplace that will never contribute or will try the IOU and it ends up feeling like you're pulling teeth when you started out with the best of intentions. It's hard, but try not to get trapped into their passive aggressive behaviors. Take the high road when trying to show appreciation and don't single anyone out by leaving anyone out. Be professional and sign it from "the department" or "the staff" or "all of us" or however you want to address yourselves. I'm sure the managers that spent money out of their own pocket ran into this as well - it comes from all levels. This is a touchy one but I think it best to try your hardest to leave the emotions out of it. I've stopped volunteering to take collections to rid myself of the aggravation.

Jocelyn April 20, 2009 at 11:11 am

We have the people who contributed to the event sign the card. That would include the people who gave money, but also the people who cooked for the potluck, helped decorate etc. The people who cannot afford to give financial try to at least bring food or something. The people who do nothing, their name is not listed on the card. Plus some people choose to get their own gift so there is no need to have their name on your group gift and the individual gift. It is a difficult situation but it is not the coordinators problem, just do what happened and the rest is left up to them to get their gift or nothing, it is their responsibility not yours.

Venus April 18, 2009 at 7:58 am

I agree with Richard and Lisa. This type of gifting to the higher ups is awkward. The managers did something nice to improve morale. So if the department wants to give them a thank you card, well, that's nice. Then the employees can sign if they want to. No trying to keep tabs on who contributed to the gift and who did not. In the best of times this sort of gift-giving at the office should be discouraged. In these difficult economic times it should simply be not allowed.

Then you have the reverse side of a coin. Where an office collection is made for an administrative assistant-type person for administrative professionals day or some such. If the managers take up a collection to give a gift, the card accompanying the gift should bear the names of only those who contributed. This is an important, telling detail. Those managers who refuse to contribute over time are typically the same managers who refuse to support the admin in his or work. Quite often they actually undermine the admin's efforts.

Lisa April 17, 2009 at 6:11 pm

I think that it's very awkward for people to be asked (expected?) to make contributions to group gifts at work. You seem to feel that everyone is obligated to contribute to this gift, and only those who can't afford it have a

legitimate reason to say “no.” That’s simply not the case, especially in these tough economic times.

We’re very lucky at our office; our bosses have made it clear that a heartfelt thank-you card is enough. They don’t want people feeling they have to spend their hard-earned money on gifts (thank you gifts or otherwise) for any managers. One of our managers feels so strongly about this that he sent an e-mail to the people that reported to him in mid-December, telling them (practically begging them!) specifically not to get him a holiday gift.

In this case, I would sign the card “from your friends in _____” and leave it at that. Singling out those who don’t contribute (for whatever reason) isn’t fair.

Irish April 17, 2009 at 2:54 pm

Always keep in mind why you are giving the card...to recognize an accomplishment by a co-worker, not to acknowledge those who choose not to participate in that recognition. Just like Teri pointed out. Your managers know who the non-payers are so keep up the good work and acknowledge the positive and let the rest go. FYI...in our department I try to get as many staff members as are available to sign a card. It personalizes the gesture and makes it that much more meaningful to the recipient.

Teri April 17, 2009 at 2:14 pm

Knowing your fellow co-workers why did you put yourself in this position. A simple Thank You card would have been the best way to show your appreciation. Trust me your managers know all too well who the non-payers are.

Red April 17, 2009 at 1:46 pm

I agree with the one person signing for the office crowd. It’s unfair to single out those who can’t afford to contribute, and everyone knows who the Scrooges are, anyway. The contribution to charity idea is also problematic. What if I’m asked to make a contribution to a charity that provides services I find morally repugnant? I want to honor the person, but do not want to contribute to something I am firmly opposed to. In a situation like that, it is probably better to send a personal card, separately, but then that feels “off” as well, and can be interpreted as a snub of the rest of the group (which it isn’t – it’s a personal belief).

In these shaky economic times, perhaps it is better to send cards of congratulations (or what-ever). If a gift is appropriate (wedding), then one card signed on behalf of “your friends in (department)” should work.

Jennifer April 17, 2009 at 1:32 pm

Considering some that refused may not have the funds as well, I would just sign from all to avoid any awkwardness for anyone.

Mark April 17, 2009 at 1:25 pm

We have had a LOT of discussion about this in the past. Some of us (myself included) thought it was wrong to include the names of those who didn't contribute because we felt it is giving credit where none is deserved. Others felt that everyone's name should be included to not embarrass anyone. We finally decided to go with the first option – those who contribute sign, those who don't, don't.

Rhonda Short April 17, 2009 at 1:21 pm

I think that contributors only should sign the gift card. Those who refused to participate definitely shouldn't get to sign the card. Personally, I wouldn't purchase another card for those who could not contribute. Cards cost money. They can send an email greeting card.

M. Jones April 17, 2009 at 1:15 pm

This is a tricky situation so we in our office decided that the best gift was a donation to the person's favorite charity (everyone has one that they hold dear to their heart) – it is the gift of giving twice over – plus it made him feel better that it was given to those less fortunate than all of us. Some folks will give when it is for charity rather than a gift (I think it forces them to think about the reason of the gift rather than the monetary value). It worked out well because it didn't matter at that point who pitched in or not as long as those who did cared enough to give to those less fortunate. Hope this helps.

Patty April 17, 2009 at 1:13 pm

I agree with those above who said to sign on behalf of the department. Every time we solicit for anything in our office, there are those who never contribute, but I always sign on behalf of the department. If there are signatures, like for a birthday card, I have everyone who is in the office sign. The recipient will know that certain people would have been out of the office at the time, so there is no embarrassment on anyone's part.

Doreen April 17, 2009 at 1:04 pm

It depends if it's the same people who never want to contribute. Some may have good reasons why they can't financially give. In my opinion and I have done this, just have them all sign the card for the sake of unity and peace in the office.

Marcia April 17, 2009 at 12:49 pm

We had this happen when someone in the office got married. Only certain people were invited to the wedding & they wanted to give their own presents. Since only a few people contributed, I just put "from your friends in

____ (& put the division name). Everyone was happy with this & no one felt uncomfortable.

Richard April 17, 2009 at 12:47 pm

Sign on behalf of the Dept. These office contribution solicitations can become awkward and uncomfortable for everyone. It also makes the managers uncomfortable as the recipients. They chose to do something for the dept and are not expecting anything in return, other than improved morale and performance. An appropriate "thank you" doesn't have to involve money.

Kim April 17, 2009 at 12:45 pm

There will always be those who do/don't contribute. I face a similar situation twice a year – I sign the card "From all of us" and leave it at that. Should you single someone out, it would be embarrassing for that person publicly (and quite possibly for you with management).

Trisha April 17, 2009 at 12:45 pm

Betty, I think this is a great idea. When staffers come to my office to contribute I will have a card waiting for them to sign. Problem solved.

Trisha April 17, 2009 at 12:42 pm

I have this same issue. I spend time coming up with the gift idea, collect the money, travel to pick up the gift and feel resentment towards those who take credit that didn't even contribute an idea or money to the cause. They could even offer to pick up the gift if they can't contribute money. They sign the card and get credit when I and others have done all the work. They are the some people each time.

Should they be signing the card? I still haven't figured this one out.

Betty April 17, 2009 at 12:40 pm

Perhaps it would be good to buy the card beforehand and then have all contributors sign the card at the same time.

Pat April 17, 2009 at 12:40 pm

For years we have dealt with this problem. Better to have one nice card for those who have cheerfully contributed for the gift attached to the gift. Another "generic" card from those that did not contribute, if you

care.

ANON April 17, 2009 at 12:37 pm

I think only those who contributed (and those who couldn't afford but would have liked to have contributed) should sign the card. We too have those who NEVER participate, yet when we sign the card from everyone, take full credit. Now only those who contribute sign the cards—no more free loaders in our office.

Donna Jean April 17, 2009 at 12:25 pm

If everyone benefited by the celebration, I would have everyone sign the card.