

# SAYING THANK YOU: Developing Your Gratitude Attitude

Recently, I heard of a bride who refused to open her gifts at the shower because she “didn’t know what to say.”

A friend of mine sent his nephew a birthday card with \$20 every year for a number of years and never heard from him until one year he inadvertently sent the card without the money. He got a note telling him that the card had arrived minus the twenty.

In an age of perceived entitlement, graciously saying “thank you” seems to be on the back burner. We live in an era of the increasingly demanding customer. We have a general notion that we deserve to get what we want, when we want it. And to a certain extent, that’s fine as long as this attitude doesn’t spill over and diminish our sense of gratitude when we need to express thanks to those who make our lives easier, more productive, more abundant, more complete and more fun.

Saying thank you often takes time and effort, and I’m as guilty as anyone at far too many lapses in my diligence to express appreciation. It’s easy to fall into the trap of rationalizing that we’re too busy or we don’t know what to say. And many times, we aren’t sure what exactly is appropriate — and when. Here are a few do’s and don’ts to consider when expressing thanks.

## Do concern yourself more with substance than form.

The issue is not so much the form that the thank you takes as the spirit behind it. But, of course, certain guidelines apply. Some situations demand a formal note; in other situations, a telephone call is sufficient. And a face-to-face thank you where the words are supported and reinforced by strong vocalism and body language can be the most powerful of all. In the final analysis, whether you do it is more important than how you do it.

Today, email and voice mail are acceptable vehicles for thanking

people, particularly for business-related intangibles such as covering for you at a meeting or referring a new client to you. Just remember that email is, for all its efficiency and relative informality, still written communication. Make sure that you take the same pains with your email thank you as you would a note written on fine stationery to make it thoughtful and sincere.

Remember also that email is never truly private. Keep the tone and content professional.

If you have received a gift or have been to someone’s home for dinner, for example, the handwritten note still wins. If you find yourself procrastinating because you find letter writing a hassle, make it easier by keeping stationary, pens, an address list and stamps in a single place where you can sit down and get it done all at once. Or, if finding the right words is difficult for you, the stores are filled with lovely thank-you cards to which you can add a personal comment and signature.

## Do respond quickly and enthusiastically.

Whatever form you use, two attributes are key whether thanking someone for a kindness, a business lunch or an expensive gift: timeliness and enthusiasm.

The two actually create a powerful synergy: the more quickly you respond, the more enthusiastic you will be. The one exception where you can cut yourself a little slack is with wedding gifts — most experts say you have up to three months to respond. If you know that responding to all those gifts is going to take some time, devise a system for letting the giver know that you did receive it, and that a more formal thank you will follow.

Late, however, is better than never. Don’t use the excuse, “It’s been so long, I’d be embarrassed to thank him now.” Apologize for the delay, and then say thanks the same way you would have had no delay occurred.



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