

A Holiday Scrooge?

Or Sage Thanksgiving Advice?©

Jeff Skrentny, CERS

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Have you even thought about it yet? The Holidays, that is?

You know, that favorite time of year to reflect on what is really important in our lives. That special time of year to enjoy the cheerful company of family and friends (*some of whom we are all too happy to see but once a year*).

And it's that time of year to **panic** as we decide what we should do, or buy, or give, to say thank you to our clients, key prospects and candidates.

Enough already I say.

Why do we do this year after year, especially when so many of us loath the practice?

I have met few in the staffing and/or search business, or in any B2B sales capacity for that matter, who love the task of addressing and sending dozens, or hundreds of holiday cards to clients, prospects and candidates; OR worse yet, trying for the umpteenth year in a row to come up with that PERFECT client holiday thank-you-for-your-business-gift.

And if you think that your holiday baskets are making a great impression, I don't care how much you spent on them, you are wrong.

Sorry, but someone has to speak the truth.

Where did the collective wisdom of our profession, of many sales professionals in many industries, decide that this time of year, which **should** be reserved for our family, our closest of friends, and ourselves, be wasted doing this December holiday thank you BS?

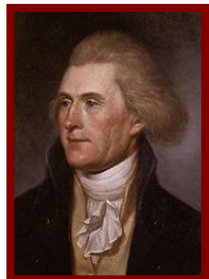
What really kills me, is even if we do have a great card that is carefully personalized with a note, and not just hastily signed and generically addressed; even if we do find what we think is a special or very personalized gift or unique charity to make a donation to; even if we get it all right for a fabulous holiday thank you impression...we will be one of what...a half dozen, a dozen, two dozen, or maybe even a hundred or more other cards and gifts that are received by those we are trying to impress at the same time of year **EVERYBODY** else is trying to do the same thing?

I have been fortunate enough to get hundreds of holiday cards through the years...I remember very few, though it is always nice to know I was thought of enough that the card was sent. Those I remember over the years are very few and almost always include a photo of all the members of an office team in a unique location.



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For example, the card The Larko Group sent me a few years back. It wasn't just a nice generic photo of the happy team in holiday attire. The one year that I remember vividly was one with the whole team standing in the middle of LaSalle Street in Chicago during the middle of a business day. That is in the heart of Chicago's business district and it is never empty enough of automobile traffic for 14 people to get into the middle of the street to pose for a holiday photo. That was the most memorable card ever, but even they could only pull it off that one very unique time. It is still their best card, though the two headed cow card wasn't bad either.

I have also been grateful for untold dozens of holiday gifts, many eaten with a cheerful and slightly guilty smile. Who sent what I have long since forgotten. But over all these years, only one thank you holiday gift was so carefully considered that I actually remember it distinctly and with a sense of being genuinely and uniquely considered before it was given to me. It is a gift I still use almost weekly, and it had NOTHING to do with my career, my work, or the profession I am in. Thanks Todd and Mark, yours was the only gift I ever received from a client, vendor or business partner that made that kind of amazing impact! It was personal, it was heartfelt, and it was for ME.

But that is so hard to pull off, even for your spouse or children, much less your clients!

Stop to consider the gifts you have given and received, how many can you recall? How many have been truly memorable? I mean truly memorable, and thought of or used almost weekly?

Am I making any sense here?

I know that there are many expectations because we live in this great capitalist society that we do, and that I love dearly. But if saying thank you is really our goal at the holidays, could we find a better and more effective time of year to say that thank you in a meaningful and memorable manner?

I think there is.

Most of you know exactly where I am going with this. Why do we say thank you at Christmas or during the December holidays, when in fact, here in America (*and in Canada too, a bit earlier in the year*) we have the PERFECT holiday to say thank you?

Yet almost none of you use it to your advantage.

THANKSGIVING.

You know, the time for **GIVING THANKS.**

Please don't send me any of your primers on the holiday and its history for the US or Canada, I read the entries on Wikipedia. I know that giving a "thanksgiving" to clients was not part of the original intent of the holiday in either country.

But, if there is a time during the year for giving thanks for the bounty in our lives, well, not sure about you, but I know that of all the things I want to say thank you for every year, one of the most important outside of family, friends and good health, is my clients (*a few key prospects*) and my candidates. Don't you agree? Without them I would not have many of the economic advantages I do. You?

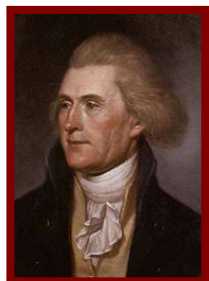
Consider the many advantages of a THANKSGIVING thank you:

- You are getting this task out of the way a month earlier in the year
- Your message of thanks gets to your clients, prospects and candidates A MONTH before everyone else's



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- Now while your competition is struggling to get this done in December, you are making business plans, reviewing employee success plans, and making cold calls to set up your success for the coming January and Q1
- You have a full month to do holiday client visits to say thank you in person while exploring the business expectations of the coming year, all set up nicely because of your thoughtful Thanksgiving thank you gesture
- EVEN if everyone who ever read this article changed their institutional bias away from this December holiday folly, it would still only be a small percent of those in this profession, so don't worry, you won't go from being lost at one holiday only to be lost in another
- It makes sense to your clients, and they like vendors and partners who do things that make sense...some will be so impressed they adopt your idea with their client thank yous...just watch, you'll see
- You have saved a large chunk of time during the holidays for family and friends, as it should be
- The year doesn't come crashing to an end with you exhausted by all these unnecessary client and candidate holiday thank you tasks, along with everything else required of you at this time of year
- It becomes fun once again, because you will get noticed and you have the time to do this thank you in the right way and in the right frame of mind

I have been doing this successfully since 2002, and **I LOVE IT.**

So have my clients. And my candidates. How do I know for sure? Because unlike my once overlooked, underwhelming or forgotten December cards, gifts and charitable donations, these THANKSGIVING gestures are noticed, remarked upon, and more appreciated than if they had been received in December. Why? Mainly because I was first and at time of year that just makes logical sense. It was not because my cards or gifts were that much better.

SIMPLY PUT, THEY JUST GOT NOTICED!

Isn't that what this thank you gesture we do in December is all about? Getting noticed? Being remembered? Staying vital in your client's mind?

So do it when it will actually BE NOTICED.

Yes, your good work should do all of this for you, but we all know that in a highly competitive market, sometimes these little extras can push you to the top of those considered. Now, I don't want you to be like the first placement and temporary firm that I ever worked for. They did have the brilliant idea to do this Thanksgiving thank you years before my first year in the business with them 22+ years ago. And though they still did the December stuff too, they continued to do a Thanksgiving thank you for every one of the 8 Thanksgivings I worked for them. But what they did to say thank you was one of those **never-do-this-if-I-run-the-place** moments for me. Their Thanksgiving gesture: a 10-12lb turkey delivered to your office frozen and ready to be taken home in its own cardboard box.

ARE YOU KIDDING ME?

I am not.

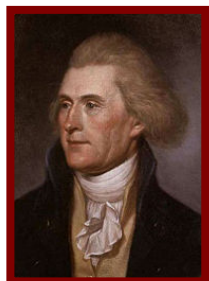
Now, delivering frozen turkeys does get you remembered. But not always in the way you want, because frankly, who wants to commute home at the end of the day during a holiday week with a 10-12lb frozen turkey?

I cannot even possibly share with you the unhappy pleasure it was to trudge around downtown Chicago delivering these frozen birds. It was not very easy to carry around



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4 or 5 at a time. But more than that, I can't even possibly express to you the insult felt when you learned they were thrown away, forgotten in the company freezer, or "accidentally" left to thaw into an unusable state.

Worst of all though, a group of us once found one of our company turkeys in the middle of the street on Michigan Avenue in the heart of downtown Chicago. It was being dodged AND hit by zooming cars trying to get out of the city, annoyed by the need to avoid one of our frozen turkeys in the middle of the road. AND YES, we did offer to donate unwanted turkeys to a food kitchen if the client really didn't think they would use them, which was great if it was selected.

I never did find out how that turkey found its way to the middle of Michigan Avenue, but after that I vowed never again. I never again delivered another frozen turkey.

Still, the idea was **all** right. But the painful memories of those frozen turkeys meant it would take me 6 years to get back to the brilliance of the idea in my own way. I finally did get back to it in 2002, and that has finally unshackled me from the annual terror of the December holiday cards and gifts.

I sincerely enjoy sharing these **Thanksgiving** thank you gestures now. The cards are sincere, I have time to write a note in each one of them, and they are often up in my client's offices in prime locations throughout the whole month of December, sometimes beyond December.

This SAGE Thanksgiving timing has been very beneficial for my business, as it will be for yours, if you can find the inertia to break the folly of December thank you cards and gifts.

But all the great timing in the world didn't help a nerd like me come up with a memorable thank you gift year after year. One I could be proud to associate myself and my business reputation with.

Truth is, I actually stopped giving gifts years ago to all but one or three clients I knew I could hit a home run with, because I knew them well enough to nail it. I have since opted for charitable donations to organizations that mattered to my wife and I, such as the American Cancer Society, The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, or several of the local arts institutions we favor here in Chicago that never seem to have enough money to do their good work. The hand calligraphed donation card was combined with an outstanding Chicago confectionary, but it never seemed to be as well received as our intent imagined.

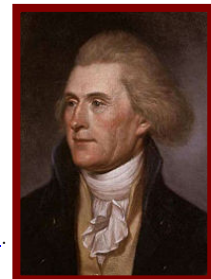
That was until four years ago when we discovered KIVA.org. It is a great way to make a charitable donation that actually isn't a donation at all. It is a micro loan to a third world entrepreneur managed by the great people at KIVA. It is an investment in self sustainable entrepreneurship that is easy to get behind as a small business owner. It is also an investment that can keep giving throughout the whole year if you allow your client to pick the recipient of the microloan with you, AND then continue to give them updates on the microloan recipient(s) they chose, even reinvesting the dollars, again with the client's involvement, as the loans are repaid. One of my clients happens to have a world map on her office wall, and now she has flags in all the places where we have made KIVA microloans together. What a great way to be remembered.

Should your client become a non-client at some point down the road, the money is still yours if you manage the dollars as we do (*all the dollars stay under our management now, because after the first year of our involvement with KIVA, where we gave gift certificates to our clients, we found we were unsatisfied with the follow up results*). Because we manage those investment dollars within the KIVA program, those dollars can be taken out of KIVA, or reinvested on your own or with another client, as you find appropriate and prudent in the future. No matter how you do it, it gives you something besides work to talk about as the portfolio updates trickle in as those you invested in report back to KIVA.



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This will be the fifth (*and final?*) year where we do this with our clients, and we are considering what else we could do that is new and attention getting like KIVA. But in surveying our clients who have made loans with us for more than one year, all of them enthusiastically endorsed continuing the KIVA program. Because we have a high degree of new clients every year due to the nature of our search work, a majority of those we do this with annually have still never heard of KIVA and are thrilled to learn more about it...and that gives us something to talk about that has nothing to do with selling our search services. I love KIVA because it gives me a chance to learn personal things about them that I might not otherwise be able to explore.

So, what will you do this year?

Yes, I know a few of you just love the December holiday season and you can't imagine doing your thank yous in any other way, at any other time. But you are blessed freaks of nature with unending and boundless holiday cheer. I don't have your capacity for boundless good cheer.

If you are not one of the blessed individuals I refer to above, and you are looking for a more sane approach to doing your holiday thank yous in a new and manageable way, let me ask you: Will you continue with the folly of December holiday thank you cards and gifts? Or will you get off the December holiday treadmill and say THANK YOU at a much more appropriate time of year, THANKSGIVING; so you can stand out, be heard and noticed first, while leaving the December holiday time for those who are most important, most precious in your world: your family, your closest and dearest friends, and yourself?

For me the decision was, and remains, one of the easiest I have ever had to make.

Try it and I am convinced you will agree. Don't wait, try it THIS YEAR, you will be thanking me in December (*and January*), and every year after this, if you do!



Jeff Skrentny, CERS

Jeff Skrentny, CERS, had an inauspicious start in the recruiting profession as his first placement left after 93 days. But since then he has put **1154** greater Chicagoland professionals into fantastic new careers with some of Chicagoland's best organizations. Jeff has been a recruiter for 23 years, and has also been a trainer, author and motivator for his profession for the last 14 years, as well as being a business consultant for its producers, managers & owners for the last 9 years, all while still running a busy IT search business in Chicago at his firm **JEFFERSON GROUP SEARCH**. Jeff not only helps bring candidates and clients together with his search services, Jeff also regularly does training sessions for candidates and his clients to ensure both have competitive interviewing and hiring practices. And he doesn't just help his clients hire new employees; with his new **Certified Employee Retention Specialist (CERS)** credential, he now consults for his clients with ideas on how to best onboard and retain their best talent to ensure profitable human capital best practices.

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