

November 2008

*“Organized people are too lazy to look for things.”*

- Bertrand Russell

### Gift Cards This Season

I love giving gift cards for presents, especially for picky teen-agers. The economic crisis is making the holidays and gift cards a bit more complicated. An inaccurate e-mail is being circulated saying many companies are closing after the holidays, and that's NOT entirely true. Some companies are closing low-performing stores, but they are remaining open and will honor gift cards. Check out the story on [Snopes](#) or [Good Morning America](#). Some advice on giving gift cards:

- Stick with stores you know will remain open. Target, Wal-Mart, Starbucks, Home Depot, The Container Store (you know I love it!), and others are going to be around a while. Do your research.
- Opt for the Visa, American Express or MasterCard gift cards. These can be used anywhere.
- Check with your bank. They may offer Visa, American Express, or MasterCard cards for a lower fee than other merchants. Chase Bank offers this as a free service for some of their customers.
- When purchasing gift cards, check the back of the card to see if the silver bar covering the access code is gone. If it is, find a different card. Thieves have been stealing the access codes and when the card is activated, they charge on your gift card before you do.
- If you want to give a different kind of gift card, try the Starbucks Coasters someone makes and sells on [Etsy](#). What a fun and clever way to recycle gift cards.

### Feeling Like a Scrooge?

I overheard two women talking, and one asked the other, “Are you ready for the holidays?” The other woman said, “No, I'm not ready to spend that money.” Unfortunately, we equate the holidays with money. It's all about the gifts. Even during Hurricane Ike, stores were putting out Christmas lights at a time when most of the city didn't have power. Madison Avenue is always busy conjuring up reasons why we need to buy things, and we've bought into it, literally. As we're feeling the financial pinch of the economy, everyone is looking to simplify for the holidays.

And speaking of the economy, here's an interesting [article](#) about how we handle our financial decisions. I gathered some tips for you to save a few bucks on your holiday spending:

- **Go potluck.** For Thanksgiving and other holiday gatherings, ask everyone to bring a dish. This way, you don't have the burden of providing everything. I usually host Thanksgiving dinner every year, and my guests and I divide up the cooking. Get togethers should be about getting together.
- **Inventory.** Take stock of what you already have in terms of wrapping paper, gift bags, tissue paper, cards, etc. You will be surprised by how much you have and don't need to buy. The Dollar Stores are great places to pick up these items if you need them.
- **Use coupons and shop with a list.** Clipping coupons and making small cutbacks will help ease the financial hit from the holidays. By shopping with a list for grocery and personal care items, you'll avoid those extras that seem to hop in your cart when you're shopping without a list.
- **Keep the credit cards at home.** Use cash. This will keep you from spending too much.
- **Prune your gift list and your budget.** This is not being stingy but realistic. No one over the age of 18 is going to notice one less gift coming into their life. Most of us already have too much stuff. Talk to your friends and family about gift-giving. Maybe this year, you all spend time together instead of buying a gift for each other.

- **What are you good at?** Instead of buying a gift, make coupons for friends and family. Get creative and share your special skills and talents. Love cooking? Offer to make dinner one night. Love renovating and decorating? Offer to paint a wall or re-arrange furniture. Love kids? Offer to babysit for busy parents. Love organizing stuff? Offer to help clean out a closet or kitchen cabinets. Are you tech-savvy? Offer to teach someone how to use a computer program, create an address database, or help someone post items to sell on e-bay.
- **Take my picture!** Photos create a simple yet heart-warming gift. Take a special photo and put in a simple frame as a gift. Scan family photos onto a CD or USB so people have copies of original photos. Make your own picture book by using scrapbooking software or PowerPoint. Save it as a PDF and print it. Kinko's and similar business offer creative ways to bind the book together.
- **Donate to charity.** For the person who has everything, donate to charity in that person's name. There are so many charities to choose from, but do your homework. In the Houston/Galveston area, several charities are helping out Hurricane Ike victims: the [Houston Food Bank](#), the [Gulf Coast Hurricane Ike Fund](#), and the Bush-Clinton Recovery Fund. Or you can give someone a flock of chickens or a cow through [Heifer International](#). Want to support the troops overseas? Go to [www.AnySoldier.com](http://www.AnySoldier.com). For gifts via M. D. Anderson, check out the Development Office's [website](#). They have one area for donations, and another for Shop for Cancer Cures, which lets you shop online and raise money for cancer research.

**Got Clutter?** I have developed 15 minute, 30 minute and 45 minute presentations on organizing, time management, and productivity. Moving to a new building? I also have a 30-minute presentation on preparing for a move for your department. I also do one-on-one sessions in your office and help you come up with a solution to your organizing problems. To schedule a presentation or a one-on-one appointment, call 713-792-8061 or email [jsimon@mdanderson.org](mailto:jsimon@mdanderson.org). *For past newsletters, click [here](#). Follow me on Twitter! Look up JaniceSimon. For Facebook, look for Janice M. Simon.*

I wish all of you a safe, happy and joyous Thanksgiving! Happy Organizing!

Janice