



## A PLAIN ENGLISH GUIDE TO GIFTS BETWEEN CITY CO-WORKERS

The City of Chicago regulates how City employees may give, solicit, or contribute to gifts to or for each other. This brief guide is intended to help you understand these rules. It's not a substitute for guidance from the Board of Ethics though—in the event that this anything in this brochure conflicts with the language of City's Governmental Ethics Ordinance, the Ordinance controls. Please call the Board of Ethics or contact your department's Ethics Officer if you have any questions.

### THE RULES

- With a few exceptions, City employees **may not give gifts directly to their official superiors, or contribute to group gifts for them.** And they may not solicit contributions from other City employees for gifts for their official superiors.

Who is your "official superior?" Any City employee(s), including your immediate supervisor(s), whose official responsibilities include directing or evaluating your performance—and the Mayor. Note though: other City elected officials are not "employees." These restrictions do not apply to gifts to them.

- With a few exceptions, City employees may not accept gifts from other City employees who receive less City pay than they do.
- Official superior may **never** coerce their subordinates into giving or contributing to or for any gift.
- Official superiors are not prohibited from giving gifts to employees they supervise.



### THE EXCEPTIONS. THEY'RE COMMON-SENSICAL.

**1. Office parties.** For occasions on which gifts are traditionally given or exchanged (birthdays, office holiday parties), City employees can give to their official superiors or other City employees who earn more City pay:

- Any token item worth less than \$10, but not cash (gift cards are okay); or
- Food or drinks to be shared in the office among co-workers.

**2. Personal hospitality at home.** City employees may invite their co-workers or official supervisors to their home. They may give, and may accept:

- Personal hospitality provided at home, if of a type and value customarily provided to personal friends (so, you can have your co-workers and boss, and their families, over for a bbq or to watch a Bears, Cubs, or Sox game); or

- 📺 Items, like flowers or dessert, given in connection with the receipt of personal hospitality, if of a type and value customarily given on such occasions (so, you can bring your host a bottle of scotch, wine, beer, dessert or flowers, when going to his or her home for a bbq, even if your host is your boss).

**3. Gifts given for life-occasions.** You can give any gift **directly** to your official superior or any other employee if it's for:

- 📺 An infrequently occurring occasion of personal significance: marriage, illness, birth or adoption of a child, death in the family, house fire or flood; or
- 📺 An occasion marking termination of an official superior relationship: retirement, resignation, or transfer.

**4. Gifts from the group.** You can solicit or make a voluntary contribution (in cash or otherwise) up to \$20 for a gift for your own or another's official superior (or another employee who makes more money), or you can make a voluntary contribution toward a gift for your own or another's official superior, if it's for:

- 📺 A special, infrequent occasion of personal significance, like those described above, or
- 📺 An occasion on which gifts are traditionally given or exchanged (like birthdays or office holiday parties).



#### **AFTER-WORK SOCIAL EVENTS**

**Common question:** A group of City co-workers is going out for drinks on a Friday evening (not for anyone's birthday, farewell or special occasion, but just like that). Can they pay for each other?

**Answer:** they can pay for colleagues who aren't their official superiors. *Bosses can buy their subordinates or reports drinks, but not vice-versa.*

**Bottom line:** it's safest to act like the proverbial group of ethics regulators at an ethics conference: go and socialize, but buy your own food and beverages (byob). Note also that you can't "cancel" or "even out" potential violations by buying things for each other: that would only compound the problems, not erase them.

**VIOLATIONS ARE GROUNDS FOR DISCIPLINE, UP TO AND INCLUDING TERMINATION.**

**QUESTIONS? PLEASE CONTACT THE BOARD OF ETHICS AT 312-744-9660**

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