



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

The City of Chicago regulates what gifts City employees may give, solicit, or contribute to or for each other. This brief guide is intended to help you understand the rules. It's not a substitute for guidance from the Board of Ethics—in the event that anything in this brochure conflicts with the language of the City's Governmental Ethics Ordinance, the Ordinance controls. Please call the Board of Ethics or contact your department's Ethics Officer with 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, nor solicit contributions from other City employees for gifts for their official superiors.**

Who is your "official superior?" Any employee(s), including your immediate supervisor(s), whose official responsibilities include directing or evaluating your performance—and the Mayor.

Note though: City elected officials are not "employees." These restrictions do not apply to gifts to elected officials other than the Mayor.

- ❗ Official superiors may **never** coerce their subordinates into giving or contributing to or for any gift.
- ❗ Official superiors are not prohibited from or limited in 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:

- ❗ Any token item or gift card worth \$10 or less, but no cash; 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 their official superiors, and their official superiors may accept:

- ❗ Personal hospitality provided at home, if of a type and value customarily provided to personal friends. So, you can have your boss and their family over for a bbq or to watch a Sky, Bears, Cubs, Bulls, Hawks 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 liquor, wine, beer, dessert, or flowers, when going to their home, even if your host is your boss.

**3. Gifts given for life-occasions.** You can give (and your official superior may accept) any gift valued at \$100 or less **directly** to your official superior if it's for an infrequently occurring occasion of personal significance, like marriage, illness, birth or adoption of a child, death in the family, house fire or flood.

**4. Gifts When Your Boss Leaves.** If your boss is retiring, being transferred, or leaving City employment, there are no restrictions on gifts you may give them directly.

**5. Gifts from the Group.** You can solicit for or make voluntary contributions (in cash or otherwise) up to \$20 for a group gift for your 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).

Note: the Board recommends that group gifts for employees who are not your official superior also be limited to \$20 per contributor—and remember: no one can be coerced into making any such contributions.



#### **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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