

Do we re-gift that dreadful present, or grin and bear it?

By [Carrie Seidman](#)
Tribune Reporter

On the day after Christmas, Coronado Center was crowded with shoppers eager to catch the first of the post-holiday sales.

But it was also crowded with people who couldn't wait to return gifts they'd opened just the day before.

People like Mary, who declined to give her last name because she was trying to return what she called "butt-ugly" nightgowns her sister gave her for Christmas.

"I won't keep something I don't like," said Mary, who was upset with her sister for giving such a "thoughtless" gift - as well as for neglecting to enclose the receipt that would have eased a return. "It *is* awkward, but I'd be a lot more careful about sparing someone's feelings if they were considerate of mine in what they picked in the first place."

In an ideal world, all received gifts would be welcome, and all bestowed presents would bring a smile. Everyone knows that's not always the case.

But what to do with an unwanted gift is a matter of sometimes heated opinion.

No less an authority than Peter Post, grandson of the legendary etiquette guru, Emily Post, has said a gift, "should be received in the manner in which it has been given." Which to Post means you accept with appreciation and gratitude regardless of whether you like something. (To Mary, who feels her sister just "ran in and bought the first thing she saw" and then clipped the tags so a return was impossible, this same pronouncement justifies her own position.)

For Thelma Domenici, the reigning doyenne of etiquette in New Mexico, consideration of the giver is the most important factor.

"There's no real right or wrong, but you never err by being considerate and gracious," says Domenici, whose company, Thelma Domenici & Associates, specializes in contemporary social skills development. "If you can remember that the gift is given with love, thought and joy, you can receive it in that spirit. Then, what to do with it afterward may not be as troublesome."

Domenici said it is always acceptable to exchange a gift for a different size or even color. But if you're going to get something altogether different, you must "respect the giver." That means communicating with them if you are planning on getting something else.

"In our family, we talk openly about it," says Domenici, sister of Sen. Pete Domenici, an Albuquerque Republican. "We listen carefully to what someone might want, and we also give them the freedom to exchange it."

That is also true in the Rewalt family. Katie Rewalt, 20, visited the mall Dec. 26 with her mother, Lucille Rewalt, who had given her a sweater Katie wanted to exchange.

"I feel completely comfortable about returning it because it's my mom," Katie Rewalt says. "It's easier to return something if it's family."

And Lucille Rewalt had no problem with her daughter's choice.

"I'd just as soon she'd get something she'll use," she says. "It's the thought that counts."

But should you decide that returning a present is out of the question, what do you do with that unwanted gift?

Never just toss it out, says Domenici, who suggested the gift might instead be given to a charity or donated as an auction item.

Or you could do what more and more people are doing - especially those in the upper income bracket, according to Money Management International, a credit-counseling agency - "re-gifting." The term, popularized by the television sitcom "Seinfeld," means giving a gift you received and didn't want to someone else.

Peter Post is dead set against it, but Domenici says not only is it acceptable, but also she has done it.

"Re-gifting can be done with incredible consideration," Domenici says. "Basically, I think gifts given with love should be received with love and should be thought about carefully in the re-gifting process."

That means following some unbreakable rules, Domenici says. First and foremost is remembering to label each gift with the original giver's name, so that, when the time comes to re-gift, the present doesn't get back to the same person or group of friends.

"Don't trust yourself to remember, because you won't," she says. "And don't re-gift just to get rid of something; be thoughtful about who you give it to."

As to what to do if a giver later remarks upon the absence of a gift, Domenici pauses momentarily before answering.

"It would be wonderful if the giver didn't put you in that spot," she says at last.

Consideration works on both ends, Domenici adds.

Maria Gonzalez and her mother might just have found the perfect return/exchange solution this year.

For Christmas, Gonzalez received a necklace that wasn't much to her liking from a family friend. Her mother received a purse with a cowgirl on it that she didn't care for from the same friend.

"Neither one of us like what we got, so I asked her if I could have the purse and she took my necklace," says Gonzalez, 21.

Sighing wistfully, she adds, "If only it was always that easy."