



Wedding invitations are not requests for presents

Ask Thelma THELMA DOMENICI For the Journal

Dear Thelma: My son in New York is getting married in California and wants to invite many to travel east to west. My fear is most won't travel and it will look like he is just fishing for gifts. Are there any guidelines?

Dear Thelma: What is proper etiquette if you are invited to but aren't attending an out-of-town wedding? Is it proper to send a wedding card? Is a gift required? I did attend a local wedding shower with a shower gift. I just don't know proper etiquette on not being able to attend the wedding.

A: As you can see, people fret over this issue from both sides, and it's a question that has been asked in various forms numerous times.

Tradition holds that everyone who receives a wedding invitation should send a gift; however, gift-giving by definition is a voluntary action. The giver makes the choice of whether to give and what to give.

The reader's engaged son can certainly invite casual acquaintances or people he hasn't had contact with in years to share in his happy news, but they shouldn't be expected to send gifts.

People close to the couple generally will be honored to receive a wedding invitation. Even if they aren't able to travel across the country to attend, they appreciate being included in the plans for celebration and will want to share in the couple's happiness. In our culture we bring or send wedding gifts to celebrate the couple and the new family they've created by their commitment.

Such gifts can launch or strengthen relationships with the new couple — even years later. A friend of mine kept many of the wedding cards she received with the gifts they accompanied. Later, when she took down a serving platter kept in its box and found the card inside, she would marvel at the relationship she'd developed with that member of her husband's family since their marriage or wonder at someone's kindness that she didn't quite appreciate years before while opening wedding gifts.

This is yet another time to use our heartsense. Givers and receivers should all let go of the notion of "fishing for gifts," which should never be a part of our attitude. If we can view wedding gifts as joining in the celebration of a beautiful, lifechanging event, we are more likely to appreciate the opportunity to give or to receive them.

As to the question of a local shower gift and an out-of-town wedding gift, again, use your heartsense. I've said it's customary to send a gift when you've received a wedding invitation; however, if you've given a costly shower gift because you knew you wouldn't

attend the wedding, then you have properly honored the couple. A wedding card or a small gift would be fine to send before the ceremony.

Let proper honor and an eye toward growing and building relationships guide you as you send and receive this season's invitations.

Dear Thelma: My neighbor has a peach tree that hangs over the fence and into my backyard. When they are ripe, would it be all right for me to pick and eat those peaches that are on my side?

A: Yes. If the peaches hang over onto your property, it's fine. It wouldn't be proper for your neighbor to come into your yard and pick the fruit, so it's all right for you to take care of it.

Because they are on your property, you really don't even have to tell your neighbor, but you could say, "Those peaches are delicious this year."

Gracious gardening and good manners never go out of style.

Have a question about etiquette? You can ask it at askthelma.com. Thelma Domenici is CEO of Thelma Domenici & Associates, offering corporate coaching and contemporary social skills development programs to all ages.



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