

A Brief Economic Defense of Regifting

Regifting is like free trade for Christmas presents. Allowing and encouraging regifting represents the true spirit of Christmas.

Let's say you want to be a great gift-giver. If you do, you need to **1) desire the best possible life outcomes for your recipient** and also **2) recognize that you don't exactly know what that best outcome is.**

All gifts, like all capitalistic ventures, require some risk and leap of faith that you have found the solution to a problem for your recipient, despite all the unknown variables.

It's also true that most gifts, like most capitalistic ventures, fail to do that.

You should encourage your recipient to feel free to regift your presents. An oven mitt which is useless to Sally (who already has an abundance of oven mitts) may be a perfect gift for her friend Sue (who is just getting started with cooking). One man's trash is another man's treasure. Our social stigma against regifting would leave Sue without a good oven mitt and leave a good oven mitt gathering dust in Sally's kitchen drawer.

With a healthy regifting economy, gifts (like goods and services) flow to their most efficient uses.

You might tell me that regifting is bad because of a loss of symbolic value when you regift something. "It's the thought that counts," you might say.

I'm not suggesting that you take the positive thought or intention out of your gifts. I'm suggesting that your intentions should include the possibility that regifting and trade is actually a good thing for the recipient, too.

I gave my sister in law a bag of coffee beans for Christmas this year. It turns out coffee is not her thing (I didn't know this), so I encouraged her to re-gift to her colleagues. Coffee beans are a great professional gift, and good professional gifts are great for building social capital and rapport.

She ended up giving the coffee to my Dad, which happened to be a great trade: he had just gotten a coffee bean grinder that same morning. This is a great example of the calculations involved in a regifting transaction. I'm none the poorer for her having given my gift away, and she is actually better off having done so.