

Why is my mother obsessed with buying me a status bag?

By Philip Galanes
The New York Times

Q: My mom has wanted to buy me a luxury bag for a few years, but I have reservations about spending lots of money on things. Still, when she asked for my opinion about a bag for herself, I provided one — though I suspected it was really for me. I texted her that I appreciate everything she does, but I asked her not to buy me a bag. (Having expensive things makes me anxious.) She agreed, but then she sent me more pictures of status bags. I repeated my request. Then I spoke to my sibling, who convinced me that gifts are my mom's way of expressing love and that she can afford it. (She's also having a hard time now caring for my grandfather.) So, I prepared myself to receive a \$2,000 bag. But the one that arrived cost \$7,000 — which stresses me out! I love my mom, but she didn't respect my feelings. How can I handle this nicely? — DAUGHTER

A: I admire your patience. It's hard to remember, sometimes, that good communication is a process that often involves failing to communicate along the way. I can't explain your mother's fixation with fancy bags, and even if gifts were her only way of expressing love, you were plenty clear that you didn't want this particular one. She may be having a rough time, but don't bury your feelings too quickly.

Now, some etiquette mavens may tell you to thank your mother and move along. (We shouldn't tell people what to give — or not to give — to us.) I disagree here: Your question isn't really about gifts; it's about getting through to your mother, kindly. You shouldn't have to choke down anxiety to make her feel good.

So, tell her that you love her, then suggest some gifts you would feel more comfortable receiving: a night at the theater, maybe, a dinner out, a weekend away. You may not be able to rein in her giving impulse, but you can help her do better. If she still reverts to pricey swag, recognize her blind spot and take care of yourself: Sell the stuff or give it away.

Who is my boyfriend's keeper?

Q: My boyfriend and I, both 20, have been together for six months. He goes through pe-

riods of anxiety and depression that he tries to address with medication and therapy. When things get challenging for him, though, his parents arrive and remove him from the situation, under the guise of protecting him. I don't think their intervention helps, but I don't want to sound like a nagging girlfriend. Should I say something? — GIRLFRIEND

A: I am not belittling you at all when I point out that six months is a relatively short period, and 20 years of age is young to manage what may be a serious illness. But if coming off as “nagging” is the worst consequence you can imagine of interfering with your boyfriend's care during depressive episodes, then you may not know enough about depression.

You may be right about the efficacy of his parents' intervention, but you haven't said anything about the seriousness of your boyfriend's illness. Talk to him more deeply about his situation, if he's open to that, as well as his preferences, before starting a tug of war with his parents over his care.

What, exactly, do you mean by ‘No Kids’?

Q: My husband's best friend is getting married soon, and my husband is a groomsman. We've been looking forward to the bash for almost a year, but when we opened our invitation, we were surprised to learn that children are not invited. We have an 8-week-old daughter. I am flummoxed about finding a babysitter in rural Tennessee, and I'm not sure I want our first babysitting experience to be with a stranger. When we asked our friend about the “no kids” policy, he suggested that my parents fly down with us. (Ha-ha!) Any suggestions for navigating this? — NEW MOM

A: Congratulations on the new baby! Unfortunately, neither her birth, nor your yearlong anticipation of the wedding, entitles you to change other people's guest lists. So, here are your options, as I see them: Try to find a local sitter whom you can check in on during the wedding and reception. (Your friends or a local pediatrician may be helpful with this.) Take turns with your husband watching the baby at your hotel. Or don't go. As you decide, though, try to center the bridal couple. This is their day — not yours.

The separation of church and check-out

Q: I work as a cashier at a charity thrift shop. My co-workers and customers frequently talk about their religious beliefs. I'm cool with that, but I am not a firm believer in any religion. Recently, a customer who was buying an expensive item started talking about his faith and asked all of us if we believed in Jesus. My co-workers said they did, but I said: “Um, I don't know. That will be \$400, please.” It did not go over well. Any advice? — EMPLOYEE

A: I am usually unwilling to discuss my religious beliefs with strangers — or on demand. It's probably not part of your job description, either. Next time, say: “My religious beliefs are private.” If the customer decides to forgo that vintage Easy Bake Oven in pristine condition, that's on him, not you.



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