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Buying for Your Significant Other: How to Beat the Stress

By [Ciara Larkin](#)

NEW YORK ([MainStreet](#)) — The winter holidays, despite the tidings of comfort and joy, are full of stress when it comes to presents. People start discussing their own wants and needs while also jotting down gift ideas for the special people in their life. If you're buying for your significant other, there's a good chance that you're in need of some help with choosing gifts for your other half.

Men, your leading lady casually mentioned that she loved that opal ring in the window of the jewelry store, but, after dating for a year, do you get her a ring that isn't THE ring? And ladies—you might want him to shave off his remaining scruff from "Movember"—do you give him the luxury shave kit? Or do you get him the pinball machine that he really wants (but that you secretly think is idiotic)? How much should you spend? Should you discuss a price point beforehand, or is that awkward?

There are a lot of questions that come along with gift-buying, and we caught up with a few experts to help with sorting out the answers.

Before you throw your blank shopping list across the room, you first need to realize that your gift choices should be determined on the nature of your own personal relationship with your significant other. If discussing anything money-related with your other half is the rough equivalent to discussing politics during Sunday dinner, then maybe discussing a price point beforehand is not for you.

Yet if the two of you are fairly open about your financials and you want to eliminate some of the "what if I spend less (or more?)" stress and awkwardness, then discussing a price point is a good beginner.

Stefanie Safran, owner of the Chicago-based dating service [Stef and the City](#), says that setting a price point for gifts is acceptable, depending on which stage in the relationship you are. If you've been dating a few months already, it's O.K. to discuss a price point in order to eliminate the unnecessary stress. However, if your relationship is more on the new side, you should get something small and save the more expensive gifts for later on. Interestingly enough, Safran also says that it's not mandatory to get equally priced gifts.

"You do not have to spend the same amount," she said. "If someone ends up spending more, it is not the end of the world. Just be sure to appropriately express your appreciation, because no matter what it is, they probably put some thought into it."

Showing gratitude goes a long way, and the joy you both share over the gifts is the true meaning behind the holidays.

Spending different amounts on each other can also be acceptable if the salaries of the two people are drastically different, according to April Masini, relationship expert and the face behind the advice forum [AskApril.com](#).

"If there's a chronic inequity in income or assets, an inequity in gift prices is not a big deal," she said. "If Donald Trump was dating a waitress who was a college student, you'd expect him to give her something lavish because he could, and you'd expect her to give him something thoughtful, but modest in dollars, because it's what she could do."

The gift can reflect someone's relative generosity based on means.

"If, however, someone is stingy, you probably already have clues about this in the relationship and shouldn't be surprised," Masini said. "But, you can circumvent this by dropping hints and having conversations in a meaningful relationship, explaining what you'd like and why, and how it makes you feel when someone holds back, monetarily, because it implies they're holding back in other ways, too."

Each couple's situation is different, but spending different amounts does not always have to bring on the embarrassing, uncomfortable conversation that most people assume will happen.

Moving on to the question of how to choose what you should actually purchase, Debbie Mandel, author of *Addicted to Stress* (Jossey-Bass, 2008), steps in by asking a difficult, thought-provoking question: is this the gift you want that person to have or is this a gift the person really wants?

"Buying a gift for a significant other involves a delicate balance of being your authentic self and seeing things from another person's perspective," Mandel says.

So, basically, if you're hating the fact that your man is continuing to rock his facial scruff, question your motives for wanting to buy him the fancy facial hair grooming kit. Is that what he really wants? Probably not. The key to a good gift is giving your significant other something that you know he or she will love, while also incorporating your own spin.

The most important thing to remember while shopping for your significant other is that gift-giving is the prime time for romance. You have full reign on how meaningful and sentimental your gift is going to be. This should feel empowering, not stressful.

"If you are stressed about it," Mandel says. "The gift becomes an obligation. Obligation can choke romance."

--Written by [Ciara Larkin](#) for [MainStreet](#)