

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

My best friend Karen is turning 21 next month, and I'd like to get her a great gift, but I don't have much money. I'll be working two jobs to pay for my college tuition, meanwhile she's spending the summer studying in Europe. Her family has a lot more money than mine does, and her parents give her everything she wants. We've known each other since kindergarten, and even though we go to school in different states we keep in constant touch. For my last birthday she took me to New York City and paid for everything. We saw two plays, stayed at a swanky hotel, and ate every meal at expensive restaurants. There's no way I can even come close to matching that kind of gift. Do you have any suggestions for me?

-- Diana

Dear Diana,

Let me tell you a quick story about a friend of mine. My friend's husband was an entrepreneur who hit it big. His company was so successful and he made so much money, that one year on her birthday, he gave her a brand new Mercedes-Benz convertible – top-of-the-line, with every feature imaginable. She was, of course, surprised, and very grateful for his generosity.

Several years later, his business hit the skids. He no longer had the money to buy the kinds of lavish gifts he had given during his successful years. On one of her birthdays, he gave his wife a book – a fifteen-dollar trade paperback. But, it was a copy of a title that his wife had mentioned that she had never read, but had always wanted to. This conversation about the book had occurred months earlier while they were visiting some friends. The fact that he remembered, and had given her something that she had expressed a great interest in, moved her to tears. She told me that this gift – this simple, inexpensive book – meant more to her than the Mercedes or the other expensive gifts he had given her over the years. “It was a gift of soul,” she told me. “The fact that he remembered something I was interested in over all those months made me feel so special.”

When it comes to gifts, one rose sometimes says more than a dozen. If Karen is your true friend – and it seems that you have had plenty of time to know this – then she will completely understand that your gifts cannot equate to hers in terms of the dollars they cost. Not to worry. Give a gift of soul.

Think about your friend. What does she like? What can't she get from anyone else but you? Here are some ideas: Put together a scrapbook of photos that depict all the times you've spent together. Write your comments about what you remember from that day you spent on the beach when you were both nine years old. Write a poem for her. Make a special meal that you know she loves. Buy a small, symbolic gift that expresses just how much you treasure her friendship, one that depicts your feelings about the sacredness and depth of your relationship. Turning twenty-one is something of a transition point in life, so use that reality to find an activity that the two of you can share. Go camping or spend the weekend together, so you will have time to reminisce and talk about each of your dreams for the future.

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People will often forget material gifts (well, maybe not that Mercedes), but will always remember gifts that are soulful and real. In “The Prophet,” Kahlil Gibran summed this up nicely. He wrote, “You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.”

You and Karen are lucky to have such a wonderful, long-standing friendship.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2004 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.