
Tricks of the Trade

The Art of the Thank-You Note

During the holidays, Geoffrey Parker, branding consultant for Parker Pen Co. and great-grandson of its founder, George S. Parker, is careful not to overlook what he calls a "critical" aspect of the gift-giving season: thank-you notes.

"It's common courtesy," he says. "If someone does something for me, I need to acknowledge that." Mr. Parker sometimes thanks a gift-giver or party host with a phone call, email or text message. But he believes that these modes are "insufficient" and always follows up with a handwritten message. "As these modern electronic devices become more common and overused, they become cheap," he says.

Mr. Parker usually sends his thank-you notes on four-by-six-inch cards with his name and address printed across the top. He favors heavier paper and cards with printed words that are raised, noting that people often subconsciously run their fingers over the printed portion of stationery when they receive a note. "People are establishing impressions based on a lot of subtle things," he says.

When writing a card, Mr. Parker eschews everyday ballpoint pens. "I feel fountain pens allow me to be more expressive," he says. He likes using a pen with a broad nib, saying that the fatter script and signature "doesn't look as if it's some-



thing that's been mass-produced." He uses ink in a different color from the printed message on the card, usually favoring a striking bright royal blue for his black-printed stationery.

Before he writes his note, he sometimes practices writing a line several times to see how it looks on paper. "People are

writing less and less these days ... a lot of people have forgotten how to write," he says. "You don't want something to be difficult to read, misunderstood or simply not understood."

He typically begins the note with a line "harking back to the last time I saw or communicated with them" and then goes on to ask about an associate or family member. "By doing this, you establish a sort of conversation, more than a blunt 'Thanks for the necktie,'" he says. While he tries to keep his message brief, he makes sure it is always more than one or two lines.

Finally, he signs off informally with his first name. "Do not use your business signature for a personal note," he says. "It can seem too formal, and a personal note should not be done in any sort of mechanical or perfunctory way." His rule of thumb: "The thought behind the thank-you should be equal to or greater than the thought that went into the gift."

—Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan