Dale Carnegie

The Leadership Gifts That Don't Need Wrapping

10 simple ways to make December better for your people

Practical actions, useful conversation starters and a simple checklist to help leaders reduce unnecessary pressure and finish the year well.

No budget. No wrapping. Just better leadership.



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Small actions that make December better

1 Give the gift of time

December calendars fill up quickly. Help people focus by moving work that does not genuinely need to happen before the break.

TRY THIS

Ask: 'What could we take off your list before Christmas?'

- [ ] Review December deadlines
- [ ] Cancel or shorten one low-value meeting
- [ ] Protect time for important work

2 Give the gift of clear priorities

When everything sounds urgent, people spend energy choosing what to do. Make the order of importance unmistakable.

TRY THIS

Say: 'What are our three priorities. The rest can wait until January.'

- [ ] Name the top three priorities
- [ ] Confirm what can wait
- [ ] Check for conflicting instructions

3 Give the gift of listening

December will not feel the same for everyone. A focused conversation can reveal pressure that would otherwise stay hidden.

TRY THIS

Ask: 'What is creating the most pressure, and what would help?'

- [ ] Put screens and notifications away
- [ ] Listen before suggesting a solution
- [ ] Agree one useful next step

4 Give the gift of specific appreciation

Specific appreciation shows that somebody's contribution has noticed and explains why it mattered.

TRY THIS

Say: 'The way you kept the client informed protected the relationship.'

- [ ] Name the action you appreciated
- [ ] Explain the positive impact
- [ ] Recognise it close to the moment

5 Give the gift of breathing room

Not every meeting, request or decision needs to be squeezed in. Protect space for people to finish important work well.

TRY THIS

Try: Cancel one meeting, shorten another and block a team focus period.

- [ ] Challenge last-minute requests
- [ ] Create interruption-free time
- [ ] Remove something before adding work



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6 Give the gift of flexibility

Travel, caring responsibilities and changing routines can complicate December. Fair flexibility can ease pressure while keeping expectations clear.

Try this

Ask: 'Would a temporary adjustment help you deliver what matters?'

- [ ] Ask rather than assume
- [ ] Apply flexibility fairly
- [ ] Agree what success still looks like

7 Give permission to switch off

Annual leave only restores people when work actually stops. Clear handovers remove the unspoken expectation to monitor messages.

Try this

Say: 'Add the handover and escalation contact, then switch off fully.'

- [ ] Set cover before leave begins
- [ ] Avoid non-urgent out-of-hours messages
- [ ] Model switching off yourself

8 Give the gift of grace

Good people can have difficult weeks. Patience and curiosity help solve the issue without lowering standards or avoiding accountability.

Try this

Ask: 'What is getting in the way, and what do we need to address?'

- [ ] Start with curiosity, not judgement
- [ ] Separate the person from the problem
- [ ] Keep expectations clear

9 Give the gift of perspective

Year-end conversations can become a list of unfinished work. Help people notice progress, learning and contribution.

Try this

Ask: 'What are you proudest of this year, and what helped?'

- [ ] Review achievements as well as gaps
- [ ] Name one lesson to carry forward
- [ ] Recognise overlooked progress

10 Give the gift of a positive start

People should not return in January to an immediate wall of demands. Agree one realistic priority for a calm, purposeful first week.

Try this

Ask: 'What is the one thing that would help us start January well?'

- [ ] Agree the first-week priority
- [ ] Avoid filling day one with meetings
- [ ] Make the next step clear before the break



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Your 10-minute December leadership check-in

Tick what is already in place, then choose one action you can take today.

☐	**TIME**	Have we removed anything that does not genuinely need to happen now?
☐	**PRIORITIES**	Can everyone name the three things that matter most before the break?
☐	**LISTENING**	Have I asked what is creating pressure rather than assumed?
☐	**APPRECIATION**	Have I recognised each person for something specific?
☐	**SPACE**	Have we protected enough time to finish important work well?
☐	**FLEXIBILITY**	Are temporary adjustments clear, fair and workable?
☐	**SWITCHING OFF**	Does everyone know the cover plan and have permission to disconnect?
☐	**PERSPECTIVE**	Have we noticed progress and learning, not only unfinished work?
☐	**JANUARY**	Is the first priority for the new year clear and realistic?

One Action I Will Take Today

Want to help your leaders bring out the best in their people?

Talk to Graham Perkins about leadership and people development.

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