

# The Dispatch

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Family Business Insight for your Agriculture Company  
December 2022: Reflections on Gifts Given

As we embrace the holiday season, one common experience we have is giving and receiving gifts as well as the feelings that accompany those gifts. The challenge for all of us is that we tend to forget or dismiss the value of a true gift, regardless of the season. In this month's Dispatch, Davon, Bill and Lance unwrap the gifts that have special meaning to them. In Davon's experience the gift of shared values, and unique drinking glasses, returns unexpected joy from a friend. Using words of comfort and care, Bill describes the gift of relaxation and peace. Finally, Lance shines light on something we may all want to receive this season, the gift listening and being heard. We hope you enjoy this month's Dispatch, and that gifts and blessings surround your lives this Christmas. -- [Ethan](#)

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## The Regifted Glasses

[Davon Cook](#)

Many of you know I am from a cotton-loving family. Growing up, we had a particular style of drinking glasses decorated with etched white cotton bolls. We had small, large, and an even fancier set for holidays. Mom always had a stockpile of them because they were gifts to customers at some point.

When I started my own household, I received the last new set, at my sentimental request. We have used them ever since. We've broken several, the decoration is wearing off, the glass is stained, and my family rolls their eyes at their very outdated look. But I love them and use one nearly every day. And somewhere along the way I decided to stockpile four for safekeeping while they were still in good shape.

Enter Dave, my husband's college friend. Dave grew up farming cotton in South Texas, and he and I connected over our common heritage. He has a very successful professional career in another state, but still returns home to harvest cotton each fall. On a visit to our house, he oohed and aahed over my decorated cotton boll glasses, which kindly counteracted my family's eye rolls.

When Dave got married in his late forties, I realized I had the perfect gift for the couple who already had their household basics covered. I unwrapped my precious stockpile of cotton glasses and sent two with a note explaining that Dave might be the only person in the world that values them as much as I do. And he does! I'm told they are on display in a special place. I kept the other two for my own children, in case they appreciate them someday. Even if they don't, I realized the joy of sharing something really special with someone who values it. What's in your closet that might hit a special chord with another?

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## A Gift Of...My Words

[Bill Long](#)

A few weeks ago a friend of mine had major back surgery. Both she and her husband are doctors, which made the procedure worse because they both understood the problem, and the challenges to the surgeon, more precisely. After surgery they invited me to their home for a visit.

I wanted to bring a gift but found myself at a loss because of the seriousness of the situation. So, I decided to read to her from a book of my poetry which I plan to publish in 2023.

I arrived to find her quite groggy but friendly, propped up in bed and trying a bit too hard to reassure me that everything was "fine." As I began to read I noticed her relaxing and intermittently shutting her eyes and then starting back to attention. My first poem, "On Beauty," evoked a small smile and knowing nod from her. Then I read her a sad poem entitled "Family Dynamics," which made her shift uncomfortably.

Taking that as a cue, I finished with a poem of hope, entitled “Reasons for Hope,” in which I say that the reason I am optimistic about our future is because of our kids—and our dogs. I saw her drift off to sleep. In my previous life as a professor if a student nodded off to sleep during a lecture I would have been offended. Now, with my friend gently sleeping, I felt somehow deeply satisfied, perhaps because my words had brought her some peace.

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## The Gift of Listening

[Lance Woodbury](#)

In my role as a mediator and family business consultant, I’m keenly aware of the need to listen. I must listen to help others identify their frustrations or concerns, and to help parties in conflict clarify their needs from one another. Listening is key to helping people move forward as a family and business.

But as a husband and father, the message I’ve received is that I am a poor listener to my own family! Indeed, listening is even more important, and harder, between family members. Due to the long-term nature of the family relationship, and the expectation we have that family members will always be around, we take each other for granted, most clearly by not listening to those closest to us. We multi-task, tune out, or wander off while someone we love is sharing something important with us.

The theologian [Paul Tillich](#) suggested “the first duty of love is to listen.” As you prepare for a few days with your family, consider the gift of *really listening* to a family member. Put down your phone. Make eye contact. Understand the emotion behind their voice. Laugh or cry with them. That gift will be felt more deeply than any present under the tree they might unwrap.