

WINTER BREAK EDITION

The principal doesn't text for gift cards. Ever.

The week before break is busy, generous and distracted, which makes it peak season for 'quick favor' texts that look like they come from a principal or director. The ask is always gift cards, always urgent and always secret.



Know the script

'Are you available?' then 'I need a favor', then gift cards for staff or a family in need. If a message follows that path, it's a scam no matter whose name or photo is on it.



Call the real number

Check the request by calling the person at the number in the staff directory, or walk to their office. Never use the number, reply or link in the message that is doing the asking.



Already bought cards? Move fast

Keep the cards and receipts, contact the gift card company right away to report it and ask for your money back, and tell your principal and help desk. Speed matters more than embarrassment.



Spot the scam



Principal Hargrove (678) 555-0119

Text message

Are you available? I'm in back-to-back meetings and can't talk. I want to surprise our custodial team before break. Can you get five \$100 gift cards today? Scratch the backs and text me pictures. I'll pay you back after break. Please don't mention it to anyone, I want it to be a surprise. Thank you so much.

Spot the scam: how many red flags can you find?

Red flags I found: ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Look for: surprise, urgency, secrecy, an unusual payment method, a sender or link you can't confirm.

FUN FACT

You can still be holding a gift card and lose every dollar on it. The FTC warns that the card number and PIN are all a scammer needs, which is exactly why they ask for photos of the back.

Source: FTC Consumer Advice: Avoiding and Reporting Gift Card Scams



Your 60-second move

Give one coworker a 30-second heads-up about this scam before break. It might be the most useful gift you give this year.



Who do I tell?

Name / ext. _____

Report channel _____



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ANSWER

Five flags: 'can't talk', gift cards, photos of the backs, a vague pay-back promise and secrecy. Safe move: don't reply. Call your principal at the number you already have or walk to the office, then report the number to your help desk so they can warn everyone.

- 'Can't talk' blocks you from verifying by voice.
- Gift cards are the payment scammers ask for most because they are hard to trace.
- Photos of the card backs give away the money on the spot.
- A vague promise to repay later.
- Secrecy keeps you from asking a coworker.