

IF YOU *LOVE* THE HOLIDAY SEASON

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Let me just say it: I *LOVE* the holidays. I extend the season by starting with my October birthday. I know I am really not supposed to, but I love the gift giving. I save throughout the year in a Christmas Club account. I want everyone's list before Thanksgiving because on black Friday, I'm going to be out at 4:30 a.m. among them—you know those crazy shoppers hitting the specials. I love it.

I love baking treats, eating treats, giving treats and receiving tins of treats. And besides eating for three months, I love the lights, the tree, and the memory attached to every individual ornament. I love midnight mass, Santa and the Toys for Tots drive.

What I don't love is feeling stressed, as if there isn't enough time in the day or enough days left to get it all done. Christmas happens whether I am ready or not. It is always right on schedule. When I center myself by quietly remembering what is truly important, everything else finds its respective place. There are four cornerstones that allow me the ability to be centered and mindful of what is important: maintaining self-care; planning; problem solving; and abiding by my do-not-do list. If I can do all this, I am in the best position to capture the fun and joy of this season.

WHAT IS TRULY IMPORTANT TO YOU: CENTRAL BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

Begin by identifying what the holiday means to you. Decide to base your behavior—what you do and what you do not do—on those beliefs. That is the gift you give yourself and others. This is individual. Do not let the beliefs or disbeliefs of others diminish yours. Some examples are:

- Christ is the reason for the season.
- Being loving is most important.
- Bringing joy is more important than bringing gifts.
- This is a time for helping others, sharing my good fortune.

Decide what attitude supports your central beliefs. Most of us have a range of characteristics from wonderful to not so wonderful. The holidays tend to bring out the best and worst in us. These are decisions you can make at the beginning of the season and the beginning of each day that will help you deliver what is most important. The following are examples of attitude adjustments:

- Increase tolerance, acceptance and patience
- Slow down and relax
- Lower expectations
- Be realistic
- Be flexible and adaptable
- Be understanding of competing values and needs
- Be patient, or kind or loving or joyful

FOUR CORNERSTONES SUPPORT YOUR ABILITY TO STAY CENTERED

Your decisions back up your behavior. Your behavior backs up your belief. What you do and what you do not do either supports or sabotages your central beliefs and attitudes.

1) MAINTAIN YOUR SELF-CARE ROUTINES:

Make exceptions be, well, the exception. This is too long a season for a suspension of general habits.

The single best behavior to protect you from the impact of stress is moderate aerobic exercise for 30 minutes most days. Maintain your exercise routines. And, if you don't have any, this is a good time to start.

Get enough sleep. Set your alarm for bedtime. When you are tired it is difficult to deal with anything, let alone everything. Stress is contagious, especially if you are tired or hungry.

Eat nutritiously most of the time. In the weeks before the holiday, double your recipes and freeze them to use during the hectic days. The single worst decision you could make for your weight is to abandon your efforts now because you will start again after the first of the year. The entire season becomes one last supper, which means overindulging because you will be deprived later.

Take, make, or create quiet time for yourself however you can. An extra five minutes in the bath can help. Get up early to read or meditate. Come home for lunch. Don't come home for lunch: Stay at your office and read or rest your eyes.

Breathe. Yes, breathe. Bring your awareness to your breath. Inhale slowly, in through your nose to a count of six. Exhale, slowly, to a count of six. Inhale slowly again feeling your lungs and diaphragm fill; exhale slowly.

2) PLAN, PLAN, AND PLAN:

Begin by planning when you can plan.

Make a list of things you would like to do over the season. Put the important ones on top and make an agreement with yourself to cross things off the bottom of the list as time or energy runs short.

Make a budget for holiday spending—including meals, donations and extras. Decide on a price range for gifts and stick to it. Start a Christmas Club account for next year.

Have a back up plan. Make a deal with yourself that it is acceptable to go to the back up plan and not stress about making everything perfect. For example, you plan to bake bread for all of your neighbors. Your back up plan B is to just bake for your two closest neighbors. Plan C: Buy loaves of nice bread. Plan D: Yell "Merry Christmas" across the street as they get out of their car.

Do as much in advance as you can—even small tasks. Wrap presents and hide them under the bed. Weeks ahead, prepare cinnamon rolls to the rising step. Freeze them. Remember to take them out of the freezer Christmas Eve Day. Then on Christmas morning, *voila*, the family wakes to the smell of freshly baked rolls.

Shop early—early in the season, early in the week, early in the day.
Even WalMart is quiet at 6:00 a.m.

Delegate chores. Have children wrap presents or pay the nonprofit group in the mall. Give everyone in your family a list of their chores to prepare for the big holiday meal.

3) PROBLEM SOLVE

People often squander an opportunity that this season holds: It comes around every year at roughly the same time, in roughly the same fashion with the same folks. If you have had a problem with the holidays in the past, it is probably going to happen again. You can plan on it. My suggestion: Do something different. Stop and think about what goes wrong and why. Decide to change it. Brainstorm solutions.

Refer to the sheet "If You Dread the Holidays" for suggestions.

4) DO NOT DO

Make your own Do Not Do list. You know exactly what belongs on the list: any behaviors that sabotage your central beliefs and attitudes for the holiday season. And, even, if it doesn't compromise your integrity, if it is going to make you feel bad or ruin someone else's day, it goes on the list.

Do not relapse into the use of addictive behaviors whether it is drinking, drugging, gambling, shopping, eating, or trying to control someone else.

Do not overindulge to the point of negative consequences for you or anyone else.

Do not get so stressed that you are making yourself or someone else miserable.

Do not spend too much money—cash or credit.

Do not start a fight with (fill in the blank).

Do not fight with your ex over the kids, especially not in front of the kids.

Do not forget what is really important to you and the attitude you want to have.