

LIGHTEN UP YOUR HOLIDAYS!

Lightening up your holidays doesn't mean adding more lights to your Christmas tree. It means easing the stress load that holidays seem to bring with them - reminders of holidays past, those we loved who aren't with us anymore, and reminders of holidays present, those we wish we didn't have to deal with again this year! Not to mention spending money on gifts, lots of temptations with food and sweets, and hectic schedules. You can lighten your load in all of these areas. There is hope for a holiday you'll want to remember for years to come.

HOLIDAYS PAST

Consider taking some time out to write about happy memories of those you loved who are no longer with you and then share them on the holiday. These written memories can also become a scrapbook for the family that you build upon every year. There is also a tradition in some cultures of setting an extra place at the table to welcome the "spirit" of those who are unable to be physically present, and actually serving up portions of food on their plate as an offering of our love.

HOLIDAYS PRESENT

A popular term these days in psychology and recovery circles is "Family-of-Choice," referring to the idea that we can choose who we honor as family and it is not necessarily our family-of-origin. Psychotherapist Laurie Ingraham of Milwaukee says that it only takes a few hours for us to hook into the family dysfunction dynamic when we are in their presence. So if the state of your family is such that you don't want to get hooked in, remember that you can choose where you go and who are with on the holidays and then make sure that you surround yourself with love. Respectfully tell those you don't want to be with that you have made other plans this year and you hope they will have a happy season.

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

It's always tempting to spend more at the holidays, especially when charge cards are available. Decide in advance what you want to spend and then stay with your budget. Remember that there are plenty of options, from homemade gifts to a basket of surprises from the dollar store. Pick up a magazine at the grocery store and check out the many craft and inexpensive gift ideas. A special tip for next year - listen to what people say they wish they would have gotten, or other comments in conversation that let you know what is special to them and make a list when you get home. Start accumulating gifts during the year as you come across those special items and next year the stress on your budget and your time will be lighter.

Sooooo Much Food!

You've probably heard it all before... drink a lot of water (8-10 glasses a day) you'll feel full, don't take seconds, exercise more, etc. etc. Well, here's a different perspective. With every bite, do a silent affirmation of loving yourself or taking care of yourself. Appreciate each bite more as you nurture your spirit as well as your body. You will probably eat less. And if you don't at least you won't be focusing on how bad all this food is for you and how hard it's going to be to lose weight later or talking to others about how you really shouldn't be doing this. All that negative self talk isn't supporting your holiday happiness or your mental health. So affirm your way through the holiday feasts!

"There's just not enough time!"

Time management is first a state of mind. If you're running around beating yourself up mentally for your disorganization or poor planning, you'll never see the light of peace of mind. Take a few minutes to look over your schedule and do some planning. Then be aware

of your thoughts and statements about time and turn them in a positive direction. Make sure your schedule includes some self-nurturing, time-out for you. Those moments of respite, a ten minute break for a cup of coffee in the middle of shopping, a long bubble bath or shower after work to rejuvenate, or just a few minutes to sit and daydream, will energize you and remind you that you are important too. Your physical and mental health will both benefit greatly. Above all, practice the attitude of gratitude. When we take time to count our blessings and see what is good in our lives, we become focused on the true spirit of the season - loving ourselves and sharing that love with others. And love always lightens the load!

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PATRICIA CLASON has been a professional speaker, trainer, consultant and writer for over twenty-five years. She is now the Director of the Center for Creative Learning which offers programs for personal and professional development at offices in Milwaukee and Madison, and Detroit. She has traveled across the continent doing over 3,000 presentations for corporations, associations, government agencies and non-profit organizations since 1975. Patricia has written many articles, training programs and personal growth seminars and has been a sought-after guest for radio and television.

The focus of her work is on alternative methods of teaching and learning that produce high quality results. Her search for the best in the technology of human resource development has taken her as a student on many adventures through traditional and some not-so-traditional training programs.

Currently she is the owner of three businesses, the Center for Creative Learning, Great Ideas! Speakers Bureau and Accountability Coaching Associates. As a consultant and coach to other businesses, large and small, in the areas of start-up, marketing, and management skills, she guides people to manifesting their dreams. Her articles often appear in business and trade

publications and her column Ask the Coach appears monthly in the Employment Times.

To keep all this together, and still have time for her family and herself, Patricia must truly practice what she teaches in the areas of communication, time management, people management and motivation.

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