



Ease expectations, enjoy holidays

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"It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year" is a song that we will hear repeatedly this holiday season. But for some, this isn't the most wonderful time of the year. Rather, it is a time that many of us find stressful and exhausting.

How will the holidays this year impact you?

If the past is any indication, many of us may wind up stressed when we realize there's so much to do and only a limited span of time to get it all done amid continuing to balance job and family responsibilities.

As one author noted, "It's like attempting to fit a size 10 foot in a size 8 shoe."

It can't happen without feeling pain and then giving up.

There probably are some important lessons that can be learned from previous holiday experiences that could be used to keep our stress level reasonably minimal and still allow us to enjoy the holidays.

Make some adjustments that will enable you to manage your activities with less stress and anxiety. Here are some things you can do to get started:

- Determine what additional activities you really want to take on, since your normal day-to-day demands most likely will remain the same.
- Rethink your approach to this holiday season, with the objective of ensuring some semblance of being organized and in control.
- Remember, there are some things you can control and others you cannot.
- Do not try to be all things to everyone.
- The economy still is stressed, so try cutting back on gift giving or at least have a budget in mind and stick to it.
- If hosting a holiday dinner, ease up and let your guests and family help out. If past experiences have had you rushing to have every food item done and on the table by a certain time, instead consider having a pot luck or buffet theme this year.
- Talk with your children about how the holidays will be handled this year and let them know their help will be needed to ensure that all goes well.
- Mark your calendar for important dates, such as when to decorate, when to start some shopping, when to schedule family gatherings and other activities.
- Analyze how you handle your current day-to-day issues. For example, if you are one who wants things done a certain way and everything done on time, then ease up and allow for some flexibility. And, if it winds up that you and your family are going to be late for an event, let it be OK rather than getting worked up and impatient and ready to snap back when one of your kids says, "Do we have to go, too?"
- Start now by making out a gift list, including keeping a watchful eye on bargain deals.
- Try your best to avoid heavy holiday traffic, but just in case, do what I do, pop in a Christmas CD while you wait for the left turn

arrow to come on at Lloyd Expressway and Burkhardt Road.

- And, by all means, stay calm and have fun.

If you anticipate the holidays with dread, then stop, assess your situation and take a few deep breaths.

I like the analogy of the basketball player who is at the free-throw line. The pressure is on, but what does he do? He takes stock of his situation, calms himself down by taking some deep breaths, and then is able to score the point.

Will this always ease the stress and ensure that everything will go perfectly? No, but ease up on yourself, try to continue to keep a good balance between your normal routine and the additional activities that come with the holidays. Remember what you can control and acknowledge those things you cannot.

Finally, there is a quote from Steven Covey, author of "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People," that makes a whole lot of sense, especially during this time of year: "The key is not to prioritize what's on your schedule, but to schedule your priorities."

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