



The Mulberry Report

Solutions For Life

December 2009

The Holiday are Coming: Too Much To Do and Not Enough Time

By Ralph Nichols, LCSW, Executive Director

That wonderful time of the year is approaching, and, before you know it, one radio station will begin playing Christmas music daily even before Thanksgiving is over. Stores are decked out for Christmas with store managers hoping that a shopping frenzy will become a daily activity right up to closing time on December 24th. Loved ones are making travel arrangements to be home for the holidays despite airline ticket prices and fewer flights, not to mention potential for bad weather and disrupted travel plans.

How will it all end? The stage is set for many of us to wind up exhausted and stressed by trying to accommodate too many activities in a limited span of time while also trying to make every effort to not max out credit cards. However, there probably can be some “lessons learned” from previous holiday experiences that can be used to keep the stress levels down and manageable. As one author noted, trying to balance job and family expectations with holiday activities is sort of like attempting to fit a size 10 foot in a size 8 shoe meaning it is almost impossible to accomplish without feeling pain and just giving up.

The adrenalin rush of trying to be all things to everyone can take its toll on the best of us, so careful planning including paring down some holiday events into more manageable activities should be the goal. Here are some tips to consider.

- Determine how much additional activity you can take on since your normal day-to-day demands will most likely remain constant.
- Rethink your approach to this holiday season so that you come out organized and in control.
- Do not try to be all things to everyone.
- If you went overboard last year, do not do it this year.
- The economy is tight right now; so, proceed with cutting back on gift giving or at least cut back on the costs of gifts.
- If hosting Thanksgiving-Christmas dinner, and past experiences have had you rushing to have every food item done and on the table by a certain time, ease up

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"The key is not to prioritize what's on your schedule, but to schedule your priorities."

- Steven Covey
Author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*

and let your guests and family make it a buffet experience with everyone bringing a dish.

- Sit down with the kids and be up front with how things will be handled this year and that their help is going to be needed too.
- Set a date to put up the tree making sure that you have plenty of time in order to avoid a last minute rush.
- Take stock of your general ways of handling day-to-day issues. For example, if you are the type of person 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, "Are we there yet?"
- Start now by making a list of tasks (not the gifts you want) but the activities you feel will need to be done so that when the due date arrives, the task(s) for that date are completed, but if you are a wee bit late, let that be ok too.
- Finally, have fun.

How we approach this Thanksgiving and Christmas season can be a mind-set that can be our own worst enemy or if handled well, can get us through the season with minimal stress. So, if your tendency is to view the holidays with dread along with the beginnings of feeling overwhelmed, then STOP, take a deep breath, assess the situation and make some mid-course corrections some of which have already been identified. Will this make everything perfect with each day flowing smoothly? No, but it can allow you to ease up on yourself (and others too) so there can continue to be some semblance of a good balance of the regular day-to-day demands with the additional activities that come with the holidays.

In a previous Mulberry article on stress, we identified two key rules to follow: (1) Don't sweat the small stuff; and, (2) When managed well, it's all small stuff. Have a safe, inexpensive, and happy holiday season. Remember! Don't let the holidays control you; instead, you be the one in control.

Mr. Nichols is a graduate of Indiana University School of Social Work with over 37 years of clinical experience in mental health. He is the Executive Director of Mulberry Center, Inc.