

GIVE YOURSELF A GIFT FOR THE HOLIDAYS



What would be the ideal gift for you during the holidays? Some new camera equipment? A new computer? A pair of great new shoes? How about some peace of mind? For many of us, that's the gift we could most use. As much as peace, joy, love and goodwill are touted during the holidays, the truth is that they can be exceedingly stressful.

One of the leading causes of stress and unhappiness during the holidays is that of our cultural expectations (yet obvious misbeliefs): that they are about being with loving, joyful families; gifts are wonderful surprises that delight; meals are delicious, enjoyed by all; everyone is filled with the Spirit of the holiday. Unfortunately, by holding tightly to those expectations, many of us become stressed, anxious, and most definitely not joyful. Many of us actually feel lonely: separated from our loved ones by distance or circumstances. Many of us are discouraged by the rampant materialism, and feel the meaning of the season is lost. Travel is expensive and trying, and family relations can be strained. How can some of the stress and anxiety be avoided?

One of the most important ways to alleviate a bit of the stress is to be aware of the expectations that you are holding, or that others are holding for or about you and give yourself a gift of choice.

Recognize, Examine, and Adapt Expectations

What are your expectations of the holidays? Expectations may be so ingrained, you aren't even aware of them! Thinking or saying, "That's the way it's supposed to be" (or should be, ought to be, or has to be) is a strong indicator you're tapping in to an expectation.

Do you feel the need to meet the expectations of others (family, friends, co-workers)? Have you gotten to the point of resenting or even dreading the holidays and folderol? That's a clue that you may be trying to meet the expectations of others. Many of us, sad to say, go through the motions of the holidays, finding them an obligation rather than a truly joyful experience.

Once we recognize the expectations we may be trying to live up to, we have the opportunity to examine whether or not they are valid and whether or not they actually work for us. In some cases, they do, and we can joyously accept and meet those expectations. We can acknowledge our choice in those decisions. Hosting the family dinner or a party, aware of our desires to have everything "just right" although at times stressful, can also be a pleasure.

In some cases the weight of obligation is so heavy, we feel we must choose to meet others' expectations. Traveling to the in-laws in another state or to be with elderly relatives may feel obligatory, but there is a choice. You may actually be weighing the decision based on the outcomes. Which is preferable - to go and get "bonus points" from your spouse or to not go and get guilty for the next year. Perhaps neither choice is very appealing, but it is a choice in the conscious choosing, you gain a greater sense of strength and in remembering your choice, more joy.

There may be times when we know the expectations can not be met without stress and/or resentment. As an example, my son and his family had planned to visit us this Christmas. It's been over a year since we've seen them and we were really looking forward to their visit. Last month, they let us know that given their work and school schedules and finances, the trip was not feasible. Were we disappointed? Yes, of course. I do have a belief that family "should" spend Christmas together, particularly when there are little ones involved. But the fact is that my son and his family live on the other side of the country, both he and his wife are in the military, and they are forming their own traditions. I grew up with all of my family living

in the San Francisco area. Holiday get togethers were easy. That isn't the case now. It's time for me to be looking at the holidays differently.

Being able to understand more about our expectations gives us the opportunity to make new choices, to adapt to what is being presented rather than our beliefs of how things should be, based on what was, or what we wish it could be. Adapting to new ways is not always easy...particularly when other people and their expectations are involved. Changing means rocking some boats, but in the long run, you really can only be responsible for your own feelings, your own expectations. If making a change is right for you, then do it. Accept the consequences of disappointing others, knowing that taking care of yourself is the best gift you can give.

Giving yourself the gift of being aware of expectations - your own and those of others - and recognizing that you have choices to meet those expectations or not untangles the web of stress-inducing behaviors during the holidays. Allow yourself this awareness this season, make your choices based on what is most supportive of your well-being, and these holidays will likely be more deeply peaceful for you.

What's that you say? I love to hear from you, and I read every email personally, even when I can't reply to all of them. Send your thoughts to kamala@vibrantlyalivewomen.com or visit my blog: www.vibrantlyalivewomen.com to add your comments! And if you prefer not to be quoted in a future article, just let me know.

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