

Winning the Internal Debate About the Holidays  
By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Many people who are self-employed, own small businesses, or are engaged in work that require high levels of responsibility, find that they struggle with an internal dialogue about taking time away from “productive” work to “socialize”, to engage in holiday preparations, or to simply observe the holidays. Keeping in mind, bottom lines at work, they struggle over the bottom line decision of whether to spend their time or spend their money on the extra tasks of holidays. They recognize that time is a very precious commodity and in making decisions about holiday tasks, assign a “value” for each hour of their own time.

They may realistically look at an estimate of the amount of time to be spent on a particular holiday task and decide that hiring someone to complete that task will save them time and money. They are attempting to use their time and money wisely. These same people may be a part of a family that wants their time and attention, and not just around the holidays. They want to spend time with their families as well. Therein lies the dilemma.

It seems to be a sign of the times that most adult people find it difficult to balance the demands of work, family, and domestic responsibilities. Many people feel guilty about not having the time, energy, and other resources to personally select, purchase, and wrap the “perfect” gift for each loved one. They feel guilty about buying cookies, cakes, and other confections at the local grocery store rather than making them. They feel guilty about hiring someone to string the lights across the roof lines of the house. They feel guilty about not traveling 700 miles each holiday to visit aging parents. Alternatively, they feel guilty when they do take the time from working to do this tasks personally. Doing so may mean that they don’t take new clients those weeks, that they don’t get important things done at work, or that they put the responsibilities on others that may or may not be able to handle them.

Creating balance in one’s life is difficult anyway. Around the holidays when the demands get ramped up several levels, maintaining balance (much less creating it), is a herculean effort. So how can you make the best use of your time, energy, and other resources? Establishing what you value you most, matching your activities to your values, and thinking outside the “you should” box, can help. Decide what is important to you (and it is ok if your job/work/career is important to you), and identify items from your “to do” list that can be eliminated by simply striking through it and letting it go. Look at your “shoulds” and ask yourself if you really believe what you are telling yourself, and if you do, where that belief comes from. Perhaps some of your beliefs need some challenge and replacement. An example might be the idea that you “should” bake

homemade sweets for the holidays and that if you don't it means that you don't care. To challenge that notion, ask yourself what else not baking sweets could mean. Chances are it means that you have more to do than time to do it in. Does that mean that you don't care? If you didn't care, you wouldn't drive yourself to the brink of exhaustion trying to do it all. If you didn't care, you would not feel guilty about taking cookies from the grocery store to the office party. If you didn't care, you wouldn't feel guilty about not getting to every special thing that you "wanted" to do for the holidays. Ok, so we have established that you care. You can choose to continue to feel guilty or you can choose to let go of that too.



***This helpful guide for managing holiday stress covers reasons why we experience extra stress during the holidays, how stress can impact addiction recovery, and makes suggestions not only on how to survive holiday stress, but how to move from anxiety and stress into effective problem solving. It Includes worksheets. Although written with the recovering person in mind, it provides helpful information to anyone experiencing "holiday stress".***

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