

# *IN SIGHT* for Oregon Lawyers and Judges

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

## THE GIFTS OF THE HOLIDAYS

The holidays can be stressful for any of us – even in the best of times. You have your regular workload, family responsibilities, and chores, and then add holiday activities, traditions, and tasks. This can be overwhelming and can turn a time of year that is supposed to be full of joy and meaning into a time of anxiety, dread, and even exhaustion.

If you're going through personally challenging circumstances – for example, divorce, depression, job loss, health issue, grief, to name just a few – the holidays can magnify stress and intensify emotions. And if you're in recovery, this season of the year provides yet more potential triggers and opportunities for relapse.

So how can we restore some balance to this time of year? How can we survive the stress – unscathed, sober, and perhaps even just a little more centered come the New Year?

### Know Your Triggers

You may be one of those people who attempts to alleviate stress, anxiety, or loneliness by filling up your calendar. Maybe being alone or staying home brings up uncomfortable feelings for you. Or you might be someone who tries to cope by isolating and withdrawing from healthy social contact. Underneath our habits, comfort zone, and coping mechanisms is the part of us that knows what we truly need. Take a moment and ask yourself what that is. Just let the answer come to you.

If what you really need is some downtime, resist the temptation to accept another invitation and maybe find a yoga

or meditation class instead. Take a long walk. Find some way to quiet your mind. If, on the other hand, you tend to isolate when what you really need is genuine connection or support, make the effort to reach out to someone – a friend, counselor, spiritual advisor, sponsor, or 12-step group. Seek community. Volunteer. Participate in a group activity that has meaning for you – whether holiday related or not.

### Bestow the Gift of Compassion

Unfortunately, many people – especially lawyers – set unrealistically high expectations for themselves and then focus on what they feel are missteps, weaknesses, and failures. At this time of year, we may also place extra pressure on ourselves to celebrate the holidays in a certain way or be the perfect host or hostess. We give compassion to others, but rarely consider giving it to ourselves.

This holiday, think of compassion as the gift to first give yourself. Let go of preconceived ideas about how the holidays should unfold. Resist the temptation to compare yourself with others or with some mythical perfect lawyer (spouse, parent, friend) that doesn't exist. Most people underestimate their contribution and the impact they have in their work and their world. Take a moment to reflect on all the ways you may have made a difference in others' lives. Allow yourself some breathing room – particularly when you feel it is scarce but you need it the most. Extend to yourself the same grace and empathy you would to someone who is special to you.

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## Practice Resilience

We are all much more resilient than we might think. It's in our basic human nature to survive and, yes, to thrive. Even under extreme hardship and chronic stress, we can develop our capacity for resilience. Consider whether you've ever relied on any of the following strategies to help you through a difficult situation:

- Making connections
- Avoiding seeing crises as insurmountable problems
- Accepting that change is part of living
- Moving toward your goals
- Taking decisive actions
- Looking for opportunities for self-discovery
- Nurturing a positive view of yourself
- Keeping things in perspective
- Maintaining a hopeful outlook
- Taking care of yourself

These are all resilience-building skills and strategies. For each of us, some of the skills and strategies are more developed than others. You might have one or more that you already consider relative strengths of yours. Choose one or two to focus on this holiday season, and notice opportunities to practice them. Don't view the strategy as one more thing you have to do, but rather as a chance to try on a different perspective.

Holiday traditions will always be with us. This year, start a new tradition. Give yourself the space, connection, compassion, and resilience that you so richly deserve.

If you would like some help dealing with the challenges you face, call 503-226-1057 or 1-800-321-6227. We are here to help.

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