



POST TRAUMATIC HOLIDAY SYNDROME

You're exhausted. You spent weeks preparing for the "big event" and it's all over in one day. It seems that it should have lasted longer given all of the preparation and work that you've been through but it doesn't. The "spirit of the Season" wanes rather quickly after the day concludes and you're back to working at it again although this time it's about cleaning up the mess. If you're reading this while doing that unwanted chore, just sit down for a moment and let's take a look back at something. The Holiday Season will be upon us once again next year and it'll come around before you know it. Although it's a Joyful Season, for many it's also a very stressful season as well. For some of you, it may be downright *traumatic*. I know that some of you plan to start your shopping early to avoid the rush so you might be back into it some time in June or July...just a few months away.

Let's take a look back...a look at what you went through this year and let's see if by doing so you might be able to avoid some of the stressful pitfalls you experienced in your preparations for the Holidays. One of the values of looking backwards is our ability to learn from our experiences and replicate what we thoroughly enjoyed and avoid what we might determine was undesirable. One of the sayings that I've adopted is that "*you don't know where you're going until you know where you've been*". I'll ask a bunch of simple questions which you can quickly answer to help you understand more about what you've been through.

EXPECTATIONS OF YOURSELF

The first thing I'd like for you to contemplate about is your expectations...both of yourself and of others this year. Did you "bite off more than you could chew?" Many people tend to do that around Holiday season for various reasons. Did you tend to *feel guilty* if you didn't "go all out"...the parties, the decorations, everything having to be "perfect"? Did you notice yourself becoming more uptight as the Season rolled on? Did you find yourself *feeling tired, listless, ragged, overworked, overwhelmed, angry, and short-tempered, not having enough time in the day, running around like a "banshee", no*

time for yourself, not enjoying what you were doing or the people for whom you were doing it?

Well if you answered “yes” to even one of those points, you probably were expecting too much of yourself...you “pushed the envelope”. People have the tendency to become very obsessive during the Holidays and choose to do too much and demand perfection in the process...most of which isn’t really necessary. There’s a saying that goes “keep it simple...stupid”. After all, what are the Holidays really about, anyway? It’s about “good will” toward others...it’s about PEOPLE ENJOYING PEOPLE.

Why can’t it be about you as well...why can’t you benefit from some of that same good will that you extend to others? You’re a “person” too, aren’t you? What if you chose to do something good for yourself at least once a day...even it that’s sitting back while putting your feet up and relaxing for just a few minutes...or stopping for lunch with a friend...or meeting your spouse after shopping for a bite to eat...or going to a movie you’ve wanted to see? I know...all of those examples take time and YOU DON’T HAVE ANY TIME TO SPARE!! Well, I understand that but what if in your doing something nice for yourself you ACTUALLY GOT MORE ACCOMPLISHED because you’re feeling refreshed and motivated? That would be a good thing, wouldn’t it?

And so, your expectations of yourself have a great deal to do with the amount and severity of stress that you’re going to experience. If your expectations are more reasonable, your stress level will be lessened and more able to be managed. Essentially, what I’m recommending is that YOU THINK OF YOURSELF FIRST! Now, that’s a novel and very unusual thought isn’t it? In fact, for many of you it’s *verboden* or forbidden. Interestingly, when we do what’s good for ourselves first, our ability to “do for others” is enhanced. That’s why, on a plane, the steward or stewardess asks that if there’s a change in pressure and you have small children, you place the oxygen mask on yourself first and then help your child. This teaches by example and facilitates the process.

EXPECTATIONS OF OTHERS

Many times we become caught up in our “holiday rush” because we expect certain reactions from people and we don’t always get it. It’s as if our worth as a person will come from others and how they relate to us especially at the Holiday time of year. It can become a vicious circle because others operate from a similar stance as well. I remember one individual that I treated in therapy who was quite well-to-do and spent literally thousands of dollars buying gifts for family and friends. He would have a gathering of maybe fifteen to twenty people gathered in his home on Christmas Eve and dole out his favors to each and every one of them. He also made sure that the values were similar so that no one would feel slighted.

Naturally, others had gifts to share as well. When it came time for him to receive what others brought as gifts for him, he would find some excuse to leave the room. It was very difficult for him to receive anything from anyone but very easy for him to give to others.

Although his concept of his tradition was that of benevolence, what it really amounted to was a question of control. Receiving, for him, made him feel “in control” while receiving resulted in very uncomfortable feelings that represented his being “out of control”. My work with him ultimately showed that experiences from his youth resulted in his feeling unloved. His yearly traditional gift-giving episode was his way of insuring that people would “love” him. He worked hard and finally realized that there were many people in his life who truly loved him for who “he was” and for what he gave them.

And now, there is a very special point that I’d like to make about this Season. There is GIVING, RECEIVING and then there is SHARING. Just about anyone can give or receive but many people do not understand the meaning of sharing. Sharing requires INVOLVEMENT...involvement between people which means there is an emotional connection associated with gift-giving. It’s not just a matter of getting what you wanted or being surprised and overwhelmed with a gift that you didn’t expect. It’s a matter of feeling connected to the person who gave or shared the gift which is more important than the gift itself. Again, this Season is about PEOPLE and now, introducing the word SHARING into the mix there is a whole different perception of what is meant by the Christmas Season. I’m always struck by the gift a child might give to someone he or she loves...a parent, grandparent or other friend or relative...something that they have made themselves. I still have objects that my children made for my wife and I thirty and thirty-five years ago. They are treasures and for me represent the true meaning of the Season and the sharing that can take place.

A shift in attitude around this concept will reduce stress significantly. Apart from the Holidays, I would recommend that you practice more of a “sharing attitude” during the rest of the year as well. When we share, there is an involvement that exists that allows the “giver” to benefit as much as the “receiver”. It’s a win-win situation which is what the Holidays are supposed to result in for all of us. Be aware of whatever pattern results in “post traumatic Holiday syndrome” and decide to make some changes. Everyone will benefit as you start the process.

And so, here is a synopsis of the salient points of this article.

- This article aims at reducing the stress of the Holidays
- Much of the stress comes from our perception of our roles
- Examining what patterns we practiced this year will help identify patterns that need changing for the future
- Our expectations of ourselves is a key factor worthy of examination:
 - Did you “bite off more than you could chew?”
 - Did you tend to *feel guilty* if you didn’t “go all out”...the parties, the decorations, everything having to be “perfect”?
 - Did you notice yourself becoming more uptight as the Season rolled on?
 - Did you find yourself *feeling tired, listless, ragged, overworked, overwhelmed, angry, and short-tempered, not having enough time in the day, running around like a “banshee”, no time for yourself, not enjoying what you were doing or the people for whom you were doing it?*

- Answering yes to any one of these would indicate that you have existing stress patterns that may need to be changed
- The Holidays are supposed to be about people interacting and enjoying other people
- Doing what's good for yourself should be the first rule of thumb
- Do you expect certain reactions from others that you may not realize?
- Is your giving presents your way of getting people to like/love you?
- Might your gift-giving be a way of your trying to control others' relationships to you?
- Are you loved for what you give or for "who you are"?
- Know the difference between giving/receiving and sharing
- Changing patterns will significantly reduce your stress level during the Holidays

A Brief Biographical Sketch

After an over 40 year career as a professional psychotherapist and Director of The Sports Stress Clinic in Amherst, NY, Charles Bonasera came to Florida and decided to use the benefits of his previous professional experiences in his new roles of Consultant in Life Management and Business Coaching as well as his expertise as a Motivational Speaker. He once again became involved with athletes in different sports training them with his techniques to help them develop and maintain focus as well as staying in their zone. Much of his training methods are derived from the CD collection he developed under the heading of WIN-WIN SECRETS as the President of Personal Identity Controls. This collection consists of thirty-six programs dealing with vital issues in the management of stress.

Another role that he adopted to add to his professional career was that of Author. Early in the 1980's he wrote Guide to a Life Management Process which he has re-written as a workbook to successfully help people manage their stress which includes his own Working Model. As a result in his interest in golf and realizing that it was essentially a "mind game", he wrote The Mental Side of Golf which can benefit the beginner as well as professionals playing the game of golf.

He then compiled over five-hundred sayings that he had developed in the course of his professional career as stimuli to help people change patterns in their lives entitled How to Stay Well and Live Life to the Fullest. This was followed by a book documenting case studies around disruptive life patterns including ways to change them under the name of How in the Hell Did This Happen to Me? Both his personal involvement in sports as a participant, coach, manager and in his role in officiating, inspired him to write a primer for parents and coaches entitled The Legend of Little League.

Charles invites you to view his website at www.charlesmbonasera.com as well as to write with your comments and questions to his e-mail address (charles@charlesmbonasera.com). He would also be very happy to communicate with his readers by telephone should they desire. His professional motto is "seeking

alternative methods to happiness” and wishes those touched by his words to practice the three secrets to a happy life: “enjoy life and enjoy it thoroughly ... develop and maintain a sense of humor ... bring as much love into your life as possible.