

Holidays: No Time to be Perfect

The holidays are tough on a lot of people. They're tough on dieters, who face the temptations of cookies, chocolate, and the latest holiday latte flavor. They're tough on recovering drinkers, who face the temptations of hot mulled wine, eggnog, and hot buttered rum.

But there is one group that suffers more than all the others, a group that faces enormous pressures and risks the likelihood of devastating failure. I am referring of course to those of us who are recovering perfectionists.

If you're one of us, maybe you've been doing a pretty good job of resisting the pressure to be perfect this fall. You let the kids go off to school in outfits they chose themselves. You laughed when you ran out of Halloween candy at 7:00.

When the fall catalogs came out, you limited yourself to just one self-improvement class.

Sure, some days it's two steps forward and one step back, but all in all you're holding our own.

Until... the Lands' End catalog arrives. Suddenly, you realize your family doesn't have fur lined, shearling house slippers for sitting around the fire on Christmas Eve. Maybe you don't even have a fireplace! Quick, order one from the Pottery Barn!

Once the Christmas holidays are over, we can relax, right? Wrong! That's what being a perfectionist means—you can never relax! After Christmas comes...Valentine's Day.

Valentine's Day is less work than Christmas. You only have to find ONE perfect present!

But hey, that just gives us more time to come up with something stunning. Not only that, but a lot of us stress over the perfect gift we hope to RECEIVE.

Let's do a little honest reflection. Do you think that your partner should know what you want without you telling him or her? Do you think the extent to which they accomplish this correlates directly with how much they love you? If so, you may be headed for a very imperfect holiday, indeed.

Romantic gestures such as gifts and weekends away are very important. Without them, love dies. But love also suffers if we take these gestures too seriously. After all, how does it make you feel to give a gift knowing it will be judged against some impossible standard? Romantic? Probably not.

Last year my dear husband decided to surprise me with a weekend in Port Townsend for the weekend. The only problem was that he didn't understand that when Valentine's Day and Presidents' Day fall on the same weekend, you'd better make reservations in advance.

The hotel he managed to get was ...well, let's just say I haven't stayed anyplace quite like it since I was a starving college student. Guess what? In the end, it made

our trip MORE romantic. The best-laid plans just don't make you laugh the way we laughed that weekend.

Of course, this year, I think I'LL make the reservations...

For me, a rewarding holiday is a lot like a rewarding relationship. I want to feel close and connected. I want to laugh and take a vacation from my daily cares. I want to make room for the joy of the unexpected. I want to take gifts in the spirit in which they are meant. If they're not absolutely perfect, it really doesn't matter.

© 2002 Claire Hatch, LICSW
www.clairehatch.com

Claire Hatch Counseling · 615 Market Street, Suite C · Kirkland · WA · 98033

Claire Hatch, LICSW, is a licensed counselor who specializes in turning marriages around. She works with clients in her Seattle area office and by phone around the world. Claire also gives seminars on how to turn conflict to connection, build a strong marriage, and balance family and work. Visit www.clairehatch.com or contact Claire by email at: claire@clairehatch.com.

You are welcome to reproduce this article anywhere as long as you include the information above.