

I CAN'T WAIT FOR
THE HOLIDAYS!

"Your Holiday Bill of Rights"

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TO BE OVER.

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(*Grumpy Cat image from <http://www.freemake.com/blog/best-summer-memes-with-grumpy-cat/>)

For many, many people, the holidays suck (at least a little bit). They are draining, paralyzing, overindulgent, and stressful. So many of us engage in blaming our stress/depression/seasonal alcoholism/weight gain on someone or something else. If you are anything like me, you want to put some traditional importance back into the holidays and celebrate them in a significant, meaningful, authentic way. I'm here to help you do just that.

Given our propensity for consumerism, you may have noticed that the holiday season is growing increasingly longer. The elongating of the season equates to mushrooming stress for many. We experience a ton of pressure – granted, much of it self-inflicted – during the last eight weeks of the year. It doesn't matter if you are a party-animal, a perfectionist, a recluse, a loner, a do-gooder, or an over-doer...the holidays tend to take their toll on us.

Can we please stop the madness for a second and get reacquainted with our core values? Can we please think about what our TRUE meaning of Christmas/Hanukkah/Kwanzaa (etc) is and why it's so important to pause in gratitude at Thanksgiving? Can we give a thought to what WE, as collective groups of individuals, want the holidays to mean for our families and the generations of our families to come? I know people have their rally cries for putting "Christ back in Christmas."

My rally cry is to enthusiastically put the heart back into the holidays.

I want you to be a harbinger of peace and love, and I also want you to make it through the next six weeks unscathed. With that rally cry and mission in mind, let's explore my Holiday Bill of Rights. Consciously applying the principles in this list will help you make it through with a lot less stress & a lot more joy.

You Have the Right to Take Responsibility for Yourself & Let the Rest Go.

Let's be frank. All of the things we experience at the holidays are a direct result of choices we have consciously made. The lines, the traffic, the debt – all a result of things we have chosen to do or chosen not to do. The temptation is to blame others in these situations: stupid cashier, dumb uncle, in-laws, terrible drivers. What a waste of time and energy! What we really need to do is accept responsibility for where we are and what we are doing and make different choices. Hate long lines? Shop via Internet. Dread the January credit card bill? Spend less. Can't avoid the holiday lines? Instead of bitching and moaning, sing Christmas carols, give someone in line a compliment, read a magazine, or put your smart phone to good use. You get the idea.

I tried Black Friday once. There I was, half asleep and getting pushed around by complete strangers in Best Buy. I found myself so miserable, stressed out, and overwhelmed by the frenetic nature of the day. I realized that my sanity was worth more than any bargain I might find and I never did it again. Going back to my core values about holidays in general, honoring my feelings, and making that simple decision has made a world of difference in my holiday mo-jo.

Like Wayne Dyer says, *"If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change."*

You Have the Right to Steer Clear of Emotionally Charged Topics of Conversation.

We've all been there when Uncle Fred decides that Christmas dinner is a great time to bring up Aunt Joan's affair. Or when the Republican side of the table passes their judgment of the Democrats along with the stuffing. Or the very Catholic matriarch embarrasses the new Jewish girlfriend. A-W-K-W-A-R-D!

Inflammatory topics of conversation have no place in holiday gatherings. Period. I have a very simple rule of thumb: I calmly, quietly, and quickly leave the room (and I usually take my kids with me). It's not uncommon for me to change my scenery at least a handful of times during a family gathering or holiday party because there is no room for anyone's drama in the midst of my joy and gratitude.

I can pretty much guarantee that minds won't be changed and value-systems won't magically transform during a holiday knock-down-drag-out. So, why go there in the first place? Remember this valuable principle: holidays will be much more enjoyable for all involved if you can keep your heart open and your mouth free of negativity.

You Have the Right to Dial Back on the Booze.

I love me some holiday cheer, and I think a drink or two is fine if you are into that kind of thing. But, a bottle of champagne in your 5'2" frame doesn't do anyone any good! Growing up in a family of alcoholics, I can speak with authority on a topic like this. Let's face it; drunken people have a propensity for ruining the holidays for everyone around them. They can be belligerent, condescending, and rude. Knowing your limit is a good rule of thumb. If having that glass or six of holiday cheer means that you are going to become a raging dill weed and hurt those around you, it's probably best to abstain. (**You might also want to abstain if you tend to eat under the influence. It will help you avoid the larger pants size come January.*)

Alcohol, along with its codependent cousins, loosens inhibitions. When on the liquid truth serum, you might be prone to saying things that you wouldn't ordinarily say in a family or

business setting. I know families that have literally been fractured and relationships that have irreparably been severed over drunken exchanges during the holidays. Do yourself a favor and remove yourself from gatherings where you feel the alcohol is getting in the way.

And, it should go without saying, but don't ever drink and drive!

You Have the Right to Spend Within Your Means.

It seems like we aren't making many deposits in our physical, emotional, financial, and spiritual bank accounts at this time of year, yet we frequently overdraft on them. Spend within your means! Yes, in relation to money, and also with your time, energy, and resources.

I have overspent at Christmas, only to scratch and claw my way out of debt the following year. I've overcommitted my time, subsequently exhausting myself in the process. Volunteering for those committees, attending those parties, over decorating, etc. -- it can be crippling. The best and most cost-effective gift I ever gave myself was the gift of "no, thank you."

Your "account balance" is going to vary dramatically each year. One year, you might have a surplus of time and no money. Another year, you might have money and no time. Some years still, you might be completely bankrupt and malnourished in most areas of life. Your priorities and allocation of time will need to change accordingly.

Give what you can at the holidays, and be grateful for those who are also giving within their means...even if it's just the gift of their voice and their undivided attention. Presence matters more than presents and you don't want to be giving this year's gifts with next year's money. You can be generous and thoughtful at the holidays without amassing a crippling amount of financial and emotional debt.

You Have the Right to Become a Master of Appreciation.

I'm pretty sure we all have at least one person in our holiday cast of characters that sets us off. This person has the ability to turn your ho-ho-ho into hell-to-the-no in two seconds flat! But you aren't going to fall victim to that this year because you remember that the cardinal rule of holiday happiness is taking responsibility for yourself and letting the rest go.

For every negative, annoying, or trying thing about a person, always try to identify at least one good thing. I firmly believe that everyone has at least one redeeming quality. Most people are doing the best they can with the tools they have available. If you can focus on appreciation for what you love instead of disdain over what you hate, you will learn to see the person in a whole new light.

Give it a shot. No matter how bad things get, you always have the capacity to look through a filter of love. You're never wrong when you come from a place of forgiveness and gratitude.

You Have the Right to Be Accommodating While Setting Limits.

Without compromising your values, be as flexible as possible at the holidays. It is perfectly within reason to be flexible, yet firm. Setting boundaries can be uncomfortable, yet also completely necessary.

A few examples of this:

- *Yes, you will happily participate in the holiday swap, but your budget only allows for \$15.*
- *You will gladly attend dinner, but only if you can bring your healthy sides and dessert so you can stay true to your meal plan.*
- *You cannot volunteer at the shelter this year, but you will put out a call for volunteers on Facebook.*

All this being said, togetherness is the name of the game at the holidays and this is NOT a time of year for keeping score or acting on a grudge. Setting limits while simultaneously honoring the spirit of the season makes for more enjoyable and less frenetic holidays.

You Have the Right to Not Compare.

Keeping up with the Joneses is a totally overrated way to live life and it's a crazy-pants way to go through the end of the year.

Steer clear of the "better than, less than" attitude when navigating through the last six weeks of the year. You might spend your holiday in the Bahamas, while I spend mine in my pajamas. You might have professional photos adorning your Tiny Prints holiday cards, while my picture is the result of a tripod and 60 outtakes. I might have my dinner professionally catered while yours is prepared at a local supermarket. One is not better than the other...they are just different. But, if you start to compare and contrast, that is the stuff that misery and insecurity comes from.

Do your holidays your way. And pay very little mind to what everyone else is doing or spending. What everyone else is up to is honestly none of your business.

You Have the Right to Not Be a Martyr.

A martyr is defined as a person who pretends to suffer or who exaggerates suffering in order to get praise or sympathy. Don't be that guy!

If you're going to do something or give something, do it because it brings you joy or do it because it fills your soul. But don't ever do it because you are expecting something in return or you want a pat on the back. Nobody needs to know about the traffic jam you endured because you offered to pick Grandma up at the airport. Nobody is keeping count of whether or not you have hosted more holidays than the in-laws. We know you got up at 4 a.m. to put the bird in the oven, but we don't want to hear about it all damn day. Nothing ruins the spirit of the holidays more than the holiday bragger or the holiday complainer.

My best advice: if you can't do something out of the goodness of your heart, just don't do it.

You Have the Right to Be Altruistic.

I encourage it all year long, but it feels particularly whole-hearted and rewarding to unfurl abundant altruism at the holidays. Please don't mistake altruism for money – you can be incredibly altruistic at this time of year without spending a cent. Hold the door for people instead of letting it slam in their face. Use your manners and be polite. Smile – at everyone. Hold a hand. Send a note. Let someone merge into traffic or cut in line. Pay a visit. Volunteer. Put your smart phone away. Go to dinner, even if you are mad about not hosting for the forth year in a row. Care.

If you have the ability to donate financially, do so. Leave a bigger tip. Buy a stranger a cup of coffee. Pay a toll. Support a charitable organization. Help the homeless. Throw a party.

Remember, you have never really lived until you've done something for somebody who can never repay you. Learn how to metaphorically plant lots of trees without ever expecting to sit under their shade.

You Have the Right to Relax and Enjoy!

Stress is the biggest buzz-kill of all. Lighten the load. Ease up on the expectations. Let go of perfectionism. Just be, and allow others to do the same. When you do that, you will make ample room for joy.

Do more of what makes you happy and the holidays will become more tolerable, and probably even enjoyable, for you and everyone around you. Joy is just as infectious as misery and I recommend you work to consciously live in and spread joy.

“Tension is who you think you should be. Relaxation is who you are.”
~Chinese Proverb

I wish you all the happiest of holidays. May you be a gift to many at the holidays, and may others do the same for you.
We are all in this together.
Much Love,
Jenn