

## **Spend Less this Christmas**

With Halloween in our rearview mirror, the time for costumes, candy, and horror is over, and so begins the season of Christmas that brings with it slightly less candy and costumes, but certainly more horror. For adults all over the western world, credit card debt and the demands of the season are the scariest monsters of all.

Between the pressures of shopping, cooking, socializing, and traveling, it's no wonder why what singer Andy Williams calls "The Most Wonderful Time of the Year" can also be seen as the most stressful time of the year for many Canadians. A study by Greenberg Quinlan Research found the most common stressors for the majority of those surveyed during the holidays were a lack of money, lack of time, and pressure of getting gifts. These demands can even act as triggers for certain individuals and increase their chances of falling into depression. Whether you notice it or not, there is a strong likelihood that you or someone in your family is susceptible to any or all of these stressors.

And so, for the sake of our collective mental health and our wallets, this Christmas I propose we spend less, not just in terms of money, but our time and energy as well.

Year after year, the Christmas season is an incredibly important time for the economy. Last year in the United States, according to the US Commerce Department, the total amount of money spent at retailers between November 1<sup>st</sup> 2016 and January 1<sup>st</sup> 2017 totaled one trillion dollars. Christmas can't come soon enough for businesses, but for the average Joe, Christmas is a financially and emotionally draining time thanks in large part to this increase in spending.

A seemingly easy solution to this problem would be for citizens to budget accordingly as not to overspend beyond their means, but that alone may not be enough for everyone. CIBC conducted a survey last year, and found that over half of Canadians will exceed their

predetermined budget. This is not necessarily caused by a lack of self-control in citizens, but rather a cultural expectation that compels them to overspend and overwork during the holidays.

In her book, *The Christmas Imperative: Leisure, Family, and Women's Work*, Leslie Bella discusses how women in particular feel the need to follow traditions for the sake of forging deeper, stronger bonds with family members around Christmas time. In other words, in order to make sure their families have an enjoyable Christmas, people are willing to stress themselves out by overspending their money on expensive gifts and decorations, and overspend their time and energy cooking and cleaning.

The best way to lessen the stress brought about by the holiday season for you and your loved ones is to rethink many of the Christmas rituals we've grown accustomed to. For starters, perhaps the most common Christmas tradition is the Christmas morning gift exchange, wherein everyone in the family gives and receives presents. Depending on how many people you feel obligated to shop for, the cost of multiple presents can add up quickly. Alternatively, a Secret Santa system, or something similar, can do well to save each other time and money. Buying one gift, perhaps with a monetary limit, is less financially stressful and time consuming than buying for everyone.

In terms of the cooking and cleaning, a communal effort can go a long way in preventing a loved one from becoming overwhelmed. Instead of having one person prepare dinner by themselves, a potluck is a better alternative to divide responsibilities so no one person must sacrifice too much of their time and energy cooking.

At the end of the day, the holidays are about family and togetherness, not customs and traditions that bury us in debt and stress. If the celebration of Christmas is too chaotic for your family, it is time to change how Christmas is celebrated. Regardless of what profit-seeking

businesses claim in their advertisements, Christmas is still Christmas without the expensive gifts and extravagant dinners. This holiday season, we're putting peace of mind at the top of our wish lists.

Terrell Watson

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