

LifeMapSM



"LifeMap is a navigational tool to help you on your path towards personal and professional success. Our belief is that you can achieve a more rewarding career, a more productive organization and a more enjoyable and abundant life."

December 2, 2008

This Week's Message:

**Taking Back
Christmas!**

Paths Forward

**Tired of boring
meetings??**

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Taking Back Christmas!

I've often said that bad news or a temporary setback can represent an opportunity that might not have appeared before. This may be the case with the current economic

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downturn. Retail associations and consumer surveys seem to agree that this year's holiday shopping season will be the weakest since the 1991 recession with almost half of shoppers saying they plan on spending less than in previous years. And that may not be all bad.

I realize that consumer spending has been one of the few areas that heretofore have been propping up a weak economy. But encouraging families to pile on more consumer debt (now at \$17,000. for the average American family - excluding mortgages) is not the answer to piratical financial executives, a declining manufacturing sector, the housing industry collapse or any of the other factors contributing to the current economic climate. With spendthrift citizens on one side of the equation and out of control government spending on the other it's pretty hard to sort out who is enabling whom. And, ho, ho, ho; now come the holidays!

For a month now the airwaves and newspapers have been crammed with holiday shopping ads. Their messages are constant, clear and unavoidable: things make you happy, buying things for others demonstrates your love and, in return, they will love you for it. For small children the sights, sounds and smells of Christmas have all but been replaced by a two month countdown to a one hour frenzy of tearing open one thing after another, with little time to enjoy anything, often characterized less with joy than with disappointment about those items from the "wish list" that did not somehow magically appear. And in another two months or so most of what did arrive is on its way to the landfill.

As if common sense didn't tell us clearly enough that something here is seriously askew, psychologist and researcher Dr. Tim Kasser at Knox College has been documenting the high price of materialism. In general he has found that happier and more satisfied people are those that make a conscious choice for simplicity in their lives. Focusing specifically on Christmas he has found that people who chose to concentrate more on family and religious activities than on the shopping / spending / gifting hamster wheel are happier and have lower stress than those who succumb to the media's merciless marketers.

Loyal members of the LifeMap community know that I do not promote any specific religious tradition as I see worthy aspects in many. But trying to create a simpler, more value-

centered Christmas can bring a more authentic and enjoyable holiday experience to both those of formal religious belief as well as to those of what might be called a spiritual secularism. Here are some constructive ideas that you might try in your family this year.

Paths Forward

- **Go For Relaxed.** Take just a second and ask yourself if your family members enjoy each other's company more when they are relaxed or when they are stressed. The obvious answer is relaxed. Often our holidays generate more stress than they provide opportunities to relax together. Make this a topic for family discussion. Where does our holiday stress come from? What activities create this stress? What thoughtful alternatives can we, together, generate that will help us have a more relaxed and enjoyable holiday season?

- **Enjoyable Versus Picture Perfect.** I never gave media maven Martha Stewart much thought. To me she appeared simply as a successful businessperson. When she had some legal problems (of a scope infinitesimal in comparison to today's financial felons) I was surprised to observe that it seemed Martha had as many fervent detractors as she had fervent supporters. Some seemed merely jealous but in interviews another theme emerged; she was getting her comeuppance for selling the idea of the perfect dinner, the perfect social event, the perfect party decorations or the perfect holiday. Interesting. If your idea of a fun holiday is obsessing about matching seasonal salt and pepper shakers, handcrafting personalized gifts for all and wood block printing your own holiday cards then go for it. But realize that a goal of "enjoyable" is more realistically achievable than the goal of "picture perfect".

- **Build Your Own Traditions.** I never bought a Christmas tree until I was about 40 years old when my Uncle Vin sold the family farm. Starting from when I was very young our family would tramp through a few fields and wooded sections hunting for an evergreen that we could cut and decorate. None of them were perfect and some of them were downright scraggly. But by the time we got it home, up and decorated (some might say disguised) it was perfect - perfect for us. Other than having the kids pictures taken with Santa try to get your traditions out of the mall. Bundle up and go for a walk downtown to enjoy the holiday lights and decorations or in a festive neighborhood; then go for

hot chocolate. Get a group together and go caroling. Do a favorite holiday movie night at home. During the season play holiday music at dinner (which you strive to have together as often as possible. Go to www.drpaulpowers.com, click on LifeMap Archive, open 4/22/08 *Let's Have Dinner.*) Set a night aside to look at family photos especially those of holidays past. During the season put a weekend day aside for all to go through the house to collect clothes, books, toys and other items that can be donated to a worthy organization. Take time to actually visit the organizations that you support through your family giving plan. Have a Christmas cookie-baking afternoon. By starting your own holiday traditions you will make the holidays truly your own. Like the Charlie Brown Christmas trees of my childhood your children will remember your family traditions long after they've forgotten all of the store bought gifts.

• **Reset The Gift Meter.** As I remember the nativity story the baby Jesus got three presents, not piles of them. How did today's excesses develop? Discussing the wisdom of cutting down on excessive gift giving with adults is easy enough but much harder with children. Start early in the season by pointing out the repetitive advertisements and the often less than honest depiction of the things they are hyping. Kids are natural cynics and, when guided, can see through the false promises of most of the plastic junk they are being sold. Help them focus on one present they would most enjoy. Try introducing the idea of Santa only filling their stockings and mom and dad leaving one present under the tree for them. They will enjoy Christmas just as much and any discomfort will likely be yours. As your children get older help them continue to reset their expectations of what Christmas means by visiting a veteran's hospital, delivering meals to the homebound, singing at a nursing home or some other service to others perhaps through your church or temple.

• **The Ultimate Gift.** No one on his or her deathbed asks for a new I-pod, a pasta maker or a set of snow tires. Ultimately, what is most important is time: time with your spouse or partner, time with your children and grandchildren, time with your friends and even some time just for yourself. There is no such thing as time management; nothing you can do will ever slow the sand flowing through the hourglass. There is, however, self-management or LifeSpace management: consciously deciding how to live your life and allocate your time given

your values and goals. Slow down and use your time to enjoy the holidays with those you love. It is the ultimate and most precious gift you can give.

LifeMap is about encouraging all to explore and define a spirituality that meets their needs for meaning and inner peace.

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Sincerely,

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