

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Scaling back on holiday gift-giving

by Nadine Goff

Your closets are cluttered with bubble bath you'll never use, or neckties you won't ever wear. Your budget is stretched thin because you're spending too much money on "obligation gifts." Frazzled and anxious, you're wondering why the once-joyous tradition of holiday gift giving has become a nightmare.

Maybe it's time to make some changes.

Challenge of change

"Somehow we've come to think that we have to spend and spend and spend every year, and few of us can truly afford to do so," says financial planner Diane McCurdy, author of *How Much Is Enough? Balancing Today's Needs with Tomorrow's Retirement Goals*. "If you're going into debt to buy

frivolous gifts for each one of your eighteen nieces and nephews, something's wrong," she asserts.

But even if you've decided it's time to say, "Enough is enough!" when it comes to holiday gift-giving, you may find it's difficult to follow through on this resolution.

Changing long-established family traditions isn't easy, says Lyric Dold, a licensed professional counselor in private practice. "Saying 'no gifts, please' without being a wet blanket is difficult," she warns. "It challenges your assertiveness skills and you have to have a lot of confidence in yourself and your choices in order to proceed."

Although it may be hard to get started, it's important to warn your family in advance if you decide to initiate changes. Start as early as possible and have a family meeting, suggests Dold. Keep lines of communication open. If necessary, hold a telephone conference call or use email.



Diane McCurdy



It's also important to set rules that people know can be changed or modified, advises Dold. Have a fluid decision-making system, not one that's rigid.

It's not just about you

Respect people's differences and, if you decide to limit your gift-giving, **don't** impose your thrifty new values on others, cautions McCurdy. "Some people truly love the shopping and gift-giving ritual," she observes. "If you love it, and can afford it, go for it!" When she advises people to pare down holiday spending, McCurdy says, "I'm speaking to the silent, suffering majority who dread the spending and stress of forced holiday merriment."

Telling family members they should stop buying you holiday gifts may also bring up some fears we're **reluctant to confront**, says Dold. "It brings up the reality that the person saying 'no more gifts, please' may be finite in terms of energy level or financial resources," she notes. "It's saying 'I'm getting tired,' and this may trigger fears of loss and change."

McCurdy advises families to create new traditions that favor holiday activities over holiday "stuff," and involve expenditures of time rather than money. "Creating your own traditions is far more rewarding than going along with the expensive, stressful status quo of giving and receiving lavish gifts."

Nadine Goff is a Madison-area freelance writer.

How Much Is Enough? Balancing Today's Needs with Tomorrow's Retirement Goals

By Diane McCurdy
John Wiley and Sons, ©2005
ISBN 0-471-73871-9
260 pages; \$14.95

Belmont
Nursing and
Rehabilitation Center

*Let our dedicated staff
make your goals of Independence a reality!*

- Physical Therapy
- Restorative Therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Speech Therapy

Let us help you meet your short-term, long-term or change of condition goals.

110 Belmont Road • Madison, WI 53714 • (608) 249-7391