The 'Six P's' can help you thrive – not just survive – during the holidays

Life & Work Connections
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The holidays are getting closer but not everyone feels excited about it. For some, they're an additional stressor or they can trigger feelings of depression. No matter how you feel about the holidays, the odds are that there is a gap between your expectations and reality.

Stephen Hawking this idea in this statement: "One of the basic rules of the universe is that nothing is perfect." Yet, with milestones, life events and holidays, we sometimes raise our expectations even higher.

Before you take an all-or-nothing approach to make the magic happen, may we suggest that you pause and reflect on an alternate approach we call the "six Ps," which we believe can help you thrive and enjoy life's events, including the holidays.

The Six P's

Pause

Social media, marketing, consumerism and many other factors are probably setting the guidelines for your holidays. Reflect on the many "hats" or roles you hold in life and work, including caregiving. As you look to holidays, celebrations and milestones, take the time to mindfully reflect on what they mean to you, and what you would like to do. Ask yourself:

- Do they have a religious significance?
- Are they simply vacation time?
- Are there any family traditions that you miss, would like to continue, or no longer practice? Is the true meaning still there?
- Do you miss how you spent the days with loved ones who are no longer in your life?

Pause and reflect on what you would like to do, and what works for your family, and focus on thriving, not on meeting unrealistic standards set by others.

Push

Family traditions, culture, religions and heritage can produce stress and guilt. Our extraordinary tenacity in trying to make holidays and milestones beyond perfect affect our expectations and may force us into hasty commitments to host family, prepare meals and carry out traditions in grandiose ways.

It's easy to focus on what we are not doing for our loved ones, and on what is not being achieved. To thrive during the holidays, push away negative self-talk, needless comparisons and self-criticism. Instead, consider taking a break from social media and other things that may affect you in negative ways. Keep in mind these strategies:

- Don't compare yourself with others. Everyone's realities are different, and it does not mean that yours are wrong/bad, and that those of others are right/good.
- Stop feeling guilty if something does not turn out as desired.
- By keeping realistic expectations can push away and say no to what cannot be done.

Remember Eleanor Roosevelt's words: "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."

Pull In

Embrace your tenacity, compassion and creativity in caregiving to create joy during holidays, milestones and other celebrations. When we pull in positive thoughts and vibes, we stop overanalyzing failure and don't allow fear to stifle our plans. Remember to learn from mistakes and see your incredible accomplishments and the tremendous value in what you do. With this perspective, use approaches that work best for you. Pulling in can also mean accepting or asking for help because, as with caregiving, we may not be able to do it alone. Don't forget to:

- Remember what has value for you and recognize it.
- Practice resilience, which is essentially adaptability.
- Have a clear idea of your role.

Pivot

Very often, we believe that our value is based on how we meet the level of perfection set by others. Not meeting these standards can lead to low self-worth, anxiety and other mental health issues like depression. Pivoting requires reflecting on self-care, respite and mental health, and also requires conversations with our loved ones. Involving and acknowledging
what is important to those we care for when it comes to significant life events can help reiterate the significance of traditions and generate inclusive ideas that recognize all ages and roles in the family.

Start rethinking important ideas and topics and reframe them. Some examples are:

- Only the brave ones ask for help and accept it when offered.
- Drop the hero cape along with the idea that you must do everything. Explore services and resources available in the community or among friends and relatives.
- When needed, adjust, create, or adapt routines and traditions.

As much as we cherish family traditions, sometimes we need to reevaluate them to accommodate our new reality or needs. There is nothing wrong with new traditions or changing what no longer works.

Plan

Rather than pile on perfection, devise a plan to uphold the needs of ourselves, our families and our communities at all gatherings. Recognize what needs to be addressed and plan accordingly.

Some considerations:

- What traditions do you want to uphold? How can you include and acknowledge traditions and celebrations with your family/community? Learn to say no and to be happy with your own expectations.
- Difficult family dynamics? How do you enjoy yourself despite critical family members? Have an open conversation and make a plan for how you will ease the pain. Do not agree to do anything or go anywhere that makes you uncomfortable.
- How can alternative arrangements be made when medical, mental health or cognitive considerations make attending events outside the home difficult?
- Can meals, cleaning and shopping responsibilities be shared with other family or community members? Can you accept help from others? Whom do you need to ask for help? Start planning early and delegate whenever possible.
- What challenges can you anticipate, and what will you do if they happen? What is your Plan B?
- What information do you need to share to reduce stress and increase collective joy?

When it comes to caregiving or planning for the holidays, every step you take to knock out the perils of perfectionism is a success. Allowing yourself the time to pause, push away the negative, pull in the positive, pivot and plan for your approaches and perspectives with all life events will greatly increase the potential for success.

Play

Once you have practiced the first five Ps, it is time to have fun! Enjoy the moment and allow yourself and others to feel good; this might include joyful activities, family stories or music. Remember to divide and conquer and, if needed, be selfish and pamper yourself!

A version of this story first appeared on the Life & Work Connections website. The story also includes a podcast where Eileen Lawless, dependent care specialist, and Lourdes A. Rodriguez, childcare and family resources manager, discuss the six Ps in more detail.

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