

# Transitions: Get Clear & Get Going!

BY ANN DALY, PHD



The sad truth is that the holidays are no longer a holiday. They're not relaxing, they're not refreshing, and they're not rejuvenating. Where's the peace? Where's the joy?

The holidays are jam-packed with obligations both real and imagined. For some women I know, the season is one long to-do list: grocery list, gift list, packing list, guest list . . .

It doesn't have to be this way. In fact, the holiday season is an ideal moment to kick what I call the "in-action addiction." You know what I mean, that compulsion to keep moving: volunteering more hours, running more errands, making more commitments. Shopping more, entertaining more, decorating more. On top of working more.

I always wonder: what is she running away from?

The first holiday after my mother died, we all gathered around my father for the ritual feast. I took responsibility in the kitchen (not my usual domain), even trying out new recipes, to make sure the day was a good one for Dad. It was emotionally draining for me, and I soon tired of all the conversation. What I soon discovered, as

I politely rebuffed all offers of help in the kitchen, was that cooking, serving, and cleaning up by myself was an effective way to hide in plain view.

I think our culture confuses action with accomplishment. At the holiday season, we confuse action with good cheer.

In-action addiction makes no distinction between what you **want** to do and what you "**should**" do. All tasks are reduced to lowest common denominator of the "to-do" list. In-action addiction means never having to say "no." You off-load the burden of having to decide your priorities and set your boundaries, but in this Faustian bargain you also give up the power to control your own life.

What can you do to enjoy the holidays more authentically? Begin with these three deceptively simple strategies.

## 1. Replace the phrase "I should" with "I want"

Just don't use the phrase any more, ever, whether you're saying it in conversation ("*I should go get Nana's present before they run out of the comforter she wants*") or in your head ("*I should*

*call Sally about when we will meet at the party*"). And don't cheat with the word "need." "I need" assumes the same external, Wizard of Oz imperative as "I should." Take ownership of your own desires. Use the word "want." "*I want to get to the store today before it closes.*" "*I want to find out from Sally what time to meet at the party.*" Words are powerful, and they will help you take back the power over your life, once you begin to take responsibility for owning those words and the intentions behind them.

## 2. Practice saying "no"

After you become accustomed to saying "I want to," you'll become able to say "*I don't want to.*" Now, I'm not imagining you saying this with a pout and a stamp of your foot. I'm imagining you saying it matter-of-factly, with a sense of self-possession and compassion. You'll find out very quickly who your true friends are, because they are the ones who will respect your preferences. The hangers-on will pout and stamp their feet.

## 3. Do 15 minutes of nothing a day

Really, I mean it. Do nothing for 15 minutes each and every day. Watch the grass grow, walk around the block, settle into your favorite chair with a mug of hot chocolate. This daily time-out is the way you'll figure out what you want. Reflection is the necessary partner to action. Together, they add up to true accomplishment. Together, they'll enable you to plan a holiday season of good cheer.

Happy Holidays!



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