**Caregiving, Career & The Holiday Season**

Nearly 17% of the workforce are also caregiving for a loved one who has a disability, injury, or illness (Family Caregiver Alliance), and this number is expected to continue growing. Perhaps one of the most challenging times during the year for a working caregiver is the holiday season. Here are 6 tips to help you more peacefully navigate the holidays when caring for a sick or disabled loved one and working:

1. Don’t be afraid to course correct. Just because you’ve always hosted the big holiday party doesn’t mean you always must. If you are caregiving and working full or even part-time, preparing for that event might be more than you can comfortably handle. Hand this year’s soiree over to someone else who is eager to host. Or outsource the event to a caterer or restaurant. While this is going to reduce your stress level, know it will also be more enjoyable for the guests. It’s likely your guests will notice if you are overwhelmed and not have as much fun if they are concerned about your well-being.
2. Rely on your caregiving crew. Every primary caregiver (captain of the caregiving ship) needs at least 1-2 secondary caregivers (first mates) and lots of tertiary caregivers (dock hands). Delegate some tasks that help you or your sick loved one to the secondary caregivers (picking up prescriptions, taking your loved one to physical therapy). Delegate even more tasks to your tertiary caregivers (picking up gift cards that you can give to the grandkids for holiday presents or shoveling snow when it storms). If you don’t have a caregiving crew, make it your New Year’s resolution to form one.
3. If your loved one has Alzheimer’s disease or another type of dementia, remember that large crowds are likely going to be overwhelming. Consider leaving that person with a paid caregiver if you are going to a big family event. Coordinate smaller gatherings of friends and family to visit your loved one at different times during the holiday season (this coordination can be delegated to a secondary or tertiary caregiver).
4. Simplify gifts. Are you still buying for all the adults in the family? While most of us can’t resist buying presents for the kids, do you really need to buy your adult sister and adult daughter lots of gifts? Opt out of gift-giving this year or draw names so you purchase for only one other adult. Or donate to charity as a family in lieu of a gift exchange.
5. Consider a stay-cation. If you typically travel during the holidays to visit friends and family, does it make sense this year? Are you just too tired? Particularly if you travel for your job or have a long daily commute, staying home a few days during the holidays might be what you need.
6. Evaluate how you are going to do things differently next year. As previously mentioned, if you are trying to do caregiving alone while working, you must make a course correction. Determine who in your life can serve as secondary or tertiary caregivers.

If you aren’t already using outside services, consider how the Area Agency on Aging, the Alzheimer’s Association, and other non-profits, home care, assisted living, nursing homes and other programs may lighten your load in the coming year.

Caregiving while working at a job is a delicate balance. Tending to small kids, a marriage and your own health at the same time can sometimes feel impossible. Consider what habits or strategies you can adjust to reduce your stress in the new year.

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