



December Newsletter – Acts of Service as Self-Care around the Hectic Holidays

By Matt Rome

Tis the season yet again! The month of December tends to be a time when our busy lives often take a back to what we really hold near and dear to our hearts – those we love and cherish. There is no question that Christmas time often inspires us to rearrange our priorities in their rightful order – the order they should conceivably be in

all the time. Suddenly, those trivial conundrums that we too frequently let worry us to the point of exhaustion fall by the wayside, and the lens in which we view life through takes on a shift. Sure, Christmas time can certainly lend itself to a jolly, lighthearted joy and tranquility in the air; however, it is not uncommon for this sacred time of the year to be an especially difficult one for many people. Loss of loved ones, estrangement from friends and family we once maintained a close bond with, and a feeling of “not having enough” are just some of the negative circumstances that can befall us and become heightened when December rolls around. Never fear my friends, because this particular newsletter will discuss some ways to better cope with the difficult times that may lie ahead for some and how to recognize and better appreciate the gifts you do in fact possess (and yes every single person has something in their life to be thankful about no matter how bleak life may seem at times). Furthermore, this newsletter will place an emphasis on acts of service as a highly effective vehicle to achieve happiness and self-esteem.

When times get tough, it is quite common to become extremely focused on one self. As human beings our natural tendency when going through a rough patch of road on the highway of life can very well be to put an enlarged magnifying glass on all that is seemingly going wrong for us. This usually equates to the utilization of all our energy, time, passion, and spirit. Unfortunately, in the aforementioned instance, all of this energy we expend tends to be largely if not all negative. As hard as this may be to swallow, please entertain the following theory:

We consciously CHOOSE how we feel, think, and react to life’s circumstances. We are not robots or victims or slaves to our life happenings. Perhaps we cannot control what is taking place around us, but we can in fact take charge of how we perceive a situation and how we respond to it. That being said, when life seems to be taking out all of its frustrations on you and your world seems to be crashing down at your feet, why not retaliate with some good ole’ fashioned positive thinking and positive action? Where am I going with all this re-framing of one’s thoughts mumbo jumbo? I am sure glad you asked! Here is my reply: ACTS OF SERVICE!

Acts of service can be a great way to shift the focus from yourself and all the negatives that may be taking up residence in your life. Not only will acts of service (i.e. volunteering at your local church, help serving food at a local food kitchen, helping in community “clean up” programs, donating any of your talents, etc.) re-route your center of attention from the self to others, but studies have shown that altruistic acts or acts of kindness actually improve human physiological functioning. Specifically, such acts of altruism appear to trigger some highly beneficial changes in the vagus nerve, which can essentially be thought of as the “brake pedal” of the human heart rate. When people are acting in a kind and generous manner, the vagus nerve seems to lower our heart rate

to a much more tranquil pace, also allowing us to breathe deeper hence lowering overall stress levels. Quite nifty huh? As this vagus nerve begins to fire, it acts as a catalyst for the release of a feel good hormone only found in mammals called oxytocin. The release of oxytocin in the human body is known to generate positive emotions, such as connectedness, warmth, trust, and fondness. So when things get hectic around the holidays, make time to engage in the aforementioned self-care techniques via lending a helping hand to others. Even something as simple as setting the dinner table for your grandmother on Christmas Eve can go a long way. Remember, what goes around comes around; therefore, the best way to receive love is to give it.

Any questions, concerns, comments? Please contact the DG Counseling, Inc. newsletter editor Matt Rome at e-mail address thomas84.matthew7@gmail.com

