



Solutions for Life

from **Solutions Counseling & EAP**
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Holiday Gifts for You (That You Can Use All Year Long)!

I think I've finally convinced the people closest to me that I don't want Christmas presents this year. I have enough stuff. And if I want more stuff, I'll go get it. So this year, I'm going for different types of gifts. Gifts you can't hold, but gifts that will impact your life. Gifts that don't cost anything, but can enrich your journey.

The gifts I will share with you today are a result of working with some wonderful people over the last several months. This past year, I have found myself in a pattern of saying certain things over and over – because they were appropriate for so many of my clients. Then I found myself saying those same things to my friends. Then I realized I was using them on a personal level.

Here are the 3 gifts I want to share with you:

You teach people how to treat you.

Really, you do. You are constantly sending messages to others about what you will and will not tolerate. Don't ever wonder why people are treating you certain ways. You "taught" them it was okay.

Here's the deal: a certain portion of the human population will take advantage of situations when allowed. Yes, it would be nice if everyone could just be ethical and get along. But that's not the way the world works. There are those among us who are only interested in themselves and getting whatever they can. And, when you teach them that you will not be the source of whatever it is they are looking for, they will quickly move on to their next victim.

If you don't like being yelled at, say so to the person who is doing the yelling. If you feel taken advantage of, say so to the person you feel is taking advantage of you. If addressing things directly does not do the trick, begin to remove yourself from that person's life. (And remember, just because you are related to a person does not mean you are stuck – you can still control where and when you see them.)

"Wow, really."

My next gift is the gift of not having to have all the answers. The next time someone brings a problem to you, try just listening. You can empathize (recognize how difficult this must be for them), but you don't have to fix it. Very often, what the person really needs is to process whatever is going on. Verbal cues ("wow," "really," "this is difficult") show them you are interested, but you are not going to jump in and make "it" go away.

This is particularly important if you have children. When siblings are arguing, resist the urge to get in there and sort it out. Let them sort it out themselves. And when one comes to tell you about it, just listen. Don't give advice, and don't say, "You go tell him that I said to stop it right now." (If you really need to step in, then get up and go step in. Don't give one child your authority – I promise they won't use it wisely.)

I'm amazed at the number of times people have solved their own problems once they are allowed to talk themselves through it. So many times in life we know what we "should" do, and on certain

levels we already have the answer. We just need to have the supportive environment to go through the process.

"How are you going to handle that?"

This goes hand-in-hand with the previous point. When you listen to someone supportively, and it appears they want something more from you, use the above question. Again, we're going for allowing others to solve their own problems. Here are some other versions:

- "Wow, this is difficult. What would you like to see happen?"
- "What do you think you need to do about this?"
- "What are you thinking you'd like to do about this?"
- "What do you think your next step is?"

I've honestly never asked those questions that the person didn't have at least some idea of an answer. The benefit of this is two-fold: it keeps you out of the "rescue everyone and fix everything" game, and it helps others learn to think for themselves. It's a win-win!

These gifts are truly secrets – because so many people have never heard of them or have never thought about them. Use the gifts wisely – no need to go around sharing them willy-nilly. Just start incorporating them into your own life, and others will pick up on the difference. When asked why you are so calm, cool, and collected, you will know they are ready for the gifts. Have a wonderful, mentally healthy holiday season!