



A Very Postconsumer Holiday
A Free Guide to Spending Less and Celebrating More

A Very Postconsumer Holiday

**A Complimentary How-To Guide on
Spending Less, Celebrating More
And Finding Joy this Holiday Season**



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an educational company helping to move society beyond addictive consumerism

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Are you looking for ways to spend less, be more environmentally friendly and not be a slave to consumerism this holiday season? Usually, about a week before Thanksgiving, many of us talk about how this year will really be the year when we get our holiday spending and “stuff” under control. Then, Black Friday rolls around and suddenly the credit cards are maxed out and there will be no room under the tree! This year, let this guide from Postconsumers help you find the satisfaction of enough in the holidays while also reducing your spending, protecting your credit and still making everybody happy! Enjoy our seven steps to “A Very Postconsumer Holiday”!

Step 1: Set a Budget. Stick to It. Don't Use Your Credit Cards

Step 2: Decide What Will Satisfy You This Holiday

Step 3: Involve the Whole Family or Your Friends

Step 4: Set a Satisfaction Action Plan

Step 5: Budget Tips: Gifts, Decorations, Sales, Food and Travel

Step 6: A Socially Responsible Holiday

Step 7: Review Your “Holiday Project” Success

Keep reading to get details on all seven steps and learn more about Postconsumers and the quest to find the satisfaction of enough! Plus, get a bonus tip on how to define your next year with a special New Year's idea!



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What is a Postconsumer Holiday?

The first question you may be asking is, simply, “What is a very Postconsumer holiday?” Well, to understand that, you’ll need to understand what Postconsumers is.

Postconsumers is an educational company helping to move society beyond addictive consumerism. Postconsumers advocates mindful consumption based on each person’s core values rather than an endless quest for “stuff.” What does that mean? It means that Postconsumers thinks everybody has a right to be happy, and that may mean that you need a lot of “stuff” or just a little “stuff.” It may mean that you want to live off-grid in a tree house, but it may also mean that you like to visit the mall once a week.

Postconsumers believes that both of these lifestyle options are perfectly fine, as long as you’re consuming in ways that make you fulfilled (you have enough!) and promote healthy ideas about the earth. Unfortunately, that’s not the case for many people in the world today.

So many people, particularly in America and the western world, have become addicted not only to consumerism but also to the idea that what defines happiness is “more, more, more.” We work harder in order to make more money in order to buy new stuff. Then, typically, we realize that we are not happy and continue to strive for more and more “stuff.” Then, guess what? We get more stuff and quickly realize that we’re still not happy! It’s a rat race in an endless circle.

Postconsumers strives to educate people on the idea of the “satisfaction of enough.” What do we mean by that? It means that Postconsumers works to give people the tools that they need to step outside of their habits, look realistically at consumerism and then determine what really leaves them feeling satisfied and happy. After that, through tools like the Postconsumers Blog (blog.postconsumers.com) and the Get Satisfied Interactive Handbook, Postconsumers helps people lay out a road map and action plan to reduce their consumer habits and find that elusive satisfaction of enough!

So what’s a “very Postconsumer holiday?” It’s a holiday where, instead of stressing out and becoming overwhelmed by consumerism and media and societal messages about materialism, you identify what will make you fulfilled this holiday and what role (or lack of role) consumerism plays in that. Then you learn how to manage your consumerism and aggressively chase your satisfaction! Read on to learn more about our seven steps for doing that.



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Step 1

Set a Budget. Stick to It. Don't Use Your Credit Cards

Step one is one of the two most important steps to experiencing a very Postconsumer holiday. After all, if you don't determine exactly what role consumer behavior plays in your holiday, you can't set limits around it. We certainly wouldn't for a minute suggest that you not spend money over the holidays. Giving presents is a kind and generous tradition. Holiday decorations and foods help infuse us with the spirit of the holiday which, at base, is a wondrous spirit that many of us would like to hold on to all year long. However, if you don't establish limits to the role consumerism will play in your life, over the holiday span consumerism can eat you (and your finances) alive!

Determine a Dollar Amount: This part should be easy! Look at your bank account, including any money you'll have coming in over the holiday months, and set a dollar amount that you are willing to spend on the holidays. Period. Estimate on the high end to avoid feeling as though you've failed if you overspend, but set a dollar amount and then that is it! You are spending no more than what you just decided.

Create a Budget: Now, look at that dollar amount and break down where you will spend it. What do you need to spend money on over the holidays? Presents, food, holiday travel, decorations? Make a list of all of the places that, during the holiday, you spend money. Then take the dollar amount that you've designated as your holiday budget and split it up across those areas based on what you think you'll need. It may even be useful to break your budget down by one more level. For example, after you determine how much money you'll be spending on presents, make a list of everybody you'll be buying presents for and then assign a dollar amount to them. Not only will that help you define your budget, but it will also make sure that you look for presents in the right budget range for people rather than simply selecting items you like for them and then wondering how you spent so much money over the holidays! Do the same thing for food, travel and any other categories you've created. You may be revising your budget later in this guide.

Track Your Budget: Now, don't just leave your budget sitting on the kitchen counter. Track it as you go through the holidays. As you buy a present for somebody, come home and mark it on your budget. If you spent less than you had budgeted then you can use that money elsewhere (or, even better, end your holiday under budget). However, if you over spent, you need to take a look at your budget and determine where you can then spend less. Knowing that you'll need to mark everything down on your budget will help you to think twice about how much you're spending each time you spend it.



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DO NOT USE YOUR CREDIT CARDS! Just don't do it! Any financial advisor will tell you this. Holidays need to happen within the means that you have available. If there's one thing that we should have all learned from the recent financial crisis in the United States, it's that there's nothing good that can come from using credit cards for unnecessary purchases. Are holiday presents, decorations, extra travel and expensive food necessary purchases? Probably not, and the ones that are should be paid for by the money that you already have available for them. Credit cards may make a handful of your holiday days more enjoyable, but chances are that you will be regretting your use of them shortly after the new year.

If you're cringing right now at the idea that you can't spend at will over the holidays, that may just be because you haven't continued on to step two of "A Very Postconsumer Holiday" yet. So keep reading, because we're going to talk about the first step to replacing your consumer-driven holidays with satisfaction-driven holidays.



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Step 2

Decide What Will Satisfy You This Holiday

So, you know what you *don't* want this holiday season. You know that you don't want to be running around, stressed out with a zero bank balance and a headache! But what is it that you *do* want? Part of the challenge to finding the satisfaction of enough in a holiday is that we're never encouraged to really slow down, stop and think about what truly makes us happy and gives us that warm and special feeling over the holidays and what we can do to get the most of whatever that "it" is. From October on, the media bombards us with messages about the "to do" list for the holidays. And, of course, that "to do" list comes with a nice price tag for every item on it. So here is a new "to do" list to help you find holiday satisfaction, the other one of the two most important parts of this guide.

Word Play: The first step is to go and find yourself a quiet spot. We might even recommend making it feel a little "holiday-like" with a candle or perhaps even your favorite holiday decoration. Get yourself a piece of paper and a pen. Let your mind go clear, then start thinking of your favorite holiday moments. Write down the words that come to your mind. Some of them may be obvious, like "family" or "food." Some of them may not be. When we did this on the Postconsumers staff, some of the unexpected words that came up were "cold", "Scrooge", "Charlie Brown", "smell of pine", "Christmas Eve visit to the neighbors" and "sound of bells." What you're trying to do is identify the things about the season that instill that warm, joyous, satisfied feeling.

If you're more visually inclined, you may want to draw these images! You should do this activity in whatever way is most comfortable for you. Honestly – that may even mean typing out a list on the computer!

Refine Your List: Do this for as long as it takes, until your brain runs completely dry. Then take a look at your list. Are there a hundred items on it? You probably need to limit your list to twenty or so items. Give a look – are there repeating themes on your list? For example, do you have "ringing bells" and "Christmas carols"? If so, you may want to merge those into one item called "Sounds of the Holidays." What you want is the ability to identify what really makes you happy over the holidays and increase the presence of that in your life. You need to identify a manageable number of things in order to do that.



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It's OK for Your List to Include Shopping! Shopping, gifts and purchasing things are all cultural parts of the holiday season. You don't need to feel guilty if those are on your list of things that you love about the holidays. The feeling of a crowded holiday mall may be stressful to some but a welcome reminder of the holiday hustle and bustle to others. The goal is not to shun consumerism for the sake of shunning consumerism! It's to identify the amount of consumerism that's healthy and sufficient for you and to incorporate it into your holiday in a satisfying and financially sound way.



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Step 3

Involve the Whole Family or Your Friends

If, at this moment, you are thinking that this is a great idea if you are a single person but a challenge if you are a family or have children, then we can understand that. After all, in a family unit you have responsibilities to make the other members of the family happy as well. Not all of your family may be ready to evaluate their relationship with consumerism and take this journey with you. However, here are some ways you can help make having “A Very Postconsumer Holiday” a family affair.

If Your Family is Ready to Make a Change...

Maybe your family really is ready to make a change in regards to evaluating each member’s relationship to consumerism, media and the quest for “stuff.” The only way that you’ll know if that’s true or not is to ask them. What’s the first step? Ask them to read this guide and see if they’re ready to follow through on taking back the holidays from the media, consumer corporations and credit card companies! If that’s the case, then your entire family can do the first two steps of this plan together. What we’d recommend is doing each step individually (each person makes their own budget list and list of things that make them feel the satisfaction of the holiday) and then the family comes together as a group to “negotiate” a family budget and satisfaction list. Not only will you come out of this with a unified plan as a family, but you’ll also get the opportunity to spend quality family time together.

If Your Family is Not Ready to Make a Change...

Perhaps, however, you are the only one in your family ready to make a change about how you approach the holidays. That’s ok, too. Different people come to different points in their journey to satisfaction at different times. However, there’s still a way that you can work towards a Postconsumer holiday and, as a benefit, set an example for the rest of your family at the same time. And that way is...

... ask your family to support your Postconsumer holiday goals as your holiday present!



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Yes, it means you may not be getting that wrapped gift delivered to you, but you'll get an even better gift. You'll get the gift of ending your holidays feeling satisfied (and financially smart). What will your family have to agree to? Well, it may mean some sacrifices on their part in terms of agreeing to not argue when you say "no" to impulse buys at sales, extra decorations, that tenth box of holiday cookies or potential limitations on gift buying. However, if you explain how important these advances are to you, you can make great inroads to getting your family and friends to accept them.

After all, realistically, how many people can argue with the statement, "All I want for Christmas (or Hanukkah or Winter Solstice or Kwanzaa) is responsible spending, happiness for everybody and the satisfaction of enough?"



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Step 4

Set a Satisfaction Action Plan

So, now you have a plan for staying in budget. You also have a list of what makes you happy about the holidays. You know what role your family will play in your journey to a Postconsumer holiday. What's next?

Having a list and making sure that you experience the things that make you happy are two entirely different things. The next step that you need to do is to make a "Satisfaction Action Plan" so that you're sure you actually experience the things that bring you holiday satisfaction.

Let's continue on with the "Sounds of the Holidays" example from Step 2 above. If you have twenty items on your list, break them out onto separate pages of paper. Then, under each item, brainstorm a list of ways that you can experience those things that make you fulfilled. "Sounds of the Holidays" might include a sublist of the following:

- Take 15 minutes each evening to sit and listen to holiday albums
- Attend a free holiday concert
- Volunteer to go caroling with a group (or organize one)
- Stop in the moment and appreciate holiday music when you're out running errands

That list, of course, could go on and on. However, the important thing is to really take the time to brainstorm ways that the things that make you feel satisfied and happy during the holidays are things that you can incorporate into your life over the upcoming months. You're probably already starting to imagine how your lists may look!

After you've made your sublists, we'd recommend going back and taking a look at the budget you set out. You may want to revise it! Is there enough of the budget allocated for the things that will make you happy instead of the things that you're "supposed to spend money on" during the holidays? If your budget doesn't accurately reflect (or, at a minimum, support) the things that will truly make you happy over the holidays, then you should revise it.



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You may also want to do some scheduling. We know! Who wants to schedule during the already over-scheduled holidays? However, a small amount of pre-planning can increase your holiday enjoyment. Using the example above, if you love holiday music but don't take the time to research and calendar the free holiday concerts that may be happening in your area, you'll shortchange yourself on satisfaction and happiness.

If you're doing this activity as a family, you'll once again need to family pow-wow and match your lists up. As before, everybody should have their own list, because happiness and satisfaction are individual processes. The goal, however, is to find ways to combine lists and cross over into each other's lists so that you can do things as a family that will leave everybody having a happy holiday.



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Step 5

Budget Tips: Gifts, Decorations, Sales, Food and Travel

Of course, for all of us, one of the most difficult parts of transitioning to a Postconsumer holiday will be learning to control our budget. It's just not something that many of us have been trained to think about. How many times have you heard the phrase, "It's the holidays" used to justify over-spending? In fact, it's very important to flip your thinking and understand that "It's the holidays" is a reason to be even more conscious about your spending since our habits (and social and media messages) encourage us to over-spend, and then spend some more, during the holidays. Here are our favorite tips for keeping your holiday budget under control.

Great Gifts That Don't Cost

By far, the biggest part of just about anybody's holiday budget will go towards gift purchases. After all, it is the season of giving. Giving presents is great. We highly advocate it! However, buying all new gifts from retail stores (even with the holiday "sales") is bad for your budget. For that matter, it's bad for the planet. Here are our favorite ways to extend the spirit of gift-giving this holiday season without breaking the bank while doing it.

Gift Swap: Instead of buying presents for each other, agree with your family or group of friends that you exchange with to either exchange previously used items or handmade gifts.

Set a Price Limit: You can also make agreements among your group of gift exchangers on a price limit. Just make it a reasonable one (we like \$10).

Simplify! Many people in recent years have switched to having everybody in a family or group of friends pull one name from a hat. Then you purchase a gift for only the person you pulled. Less consumer goods enter the stream and everybody saves a great deal of money.

The Gift of TLC: Be honest, would you rather get a great back rub than another sweater with a reindeer on it? Give the gift of tlc (when and where



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appropriate!) this holiday season. That doesn't mean that it has to be intimate. If you have a skill set (such as cutting hair or home repairs) you can give the special gift of sharing your skill set with somebody who needs it.

Get Crafty: Of course, handmade gifts really are the best, and they can save you money and use found objects or craft materials you already own.

Socially Responsible Gifts: There's also the option of non-tangible gifts that make the world a better place. See Step Six for advice!

Buying Decorations: Do You Really Need to Do That?

If you walk into your average department store, drug store or even grocery store, you would be led to believe that nobody in America has any holiday decorations stored in their home. In fact, we all know this to be untrue. You most likely have an entire box of holiday lights, decorations and mementos somewhere. Many of us have *many* boxes of these items. Of course, as the holiday spirit hits you, it's always tempting to pick up "just one more" holiday decoration because "it's absolutely perfect." Just say no! Unless there is a huge, compelling reason to buy a new holiday decoration, remember that you are fully stocked and just don't need more. Always recycle whenever you can.

The Lure of the Sale: Unnecessary Purchases Aren't Savings

These days, the words "holiday" and "sale" are largely synonymous. Holiday sales can be a great benefit to you if an item that *you actually need* is on sale. If you have to replace your television, it probably is in your best interest to wait until the holiday sales begin and then purchase a new one! However, you're not actually saving money if you buy items that you don't really need just because they're on sale. This is particularly true if the item is an "upgrade" from a perfectly fine item that you already own. Just because something costs less than it usually does, it doesn't mean that it's a wise use of your money.

Wasted Food is Wasted Money

The amount of food Americans waste is almost shameful, and, particularly in the heart of a recession when food banks are maxed out to capacity, food waste is completely avoidable. Be aware of how much food you're purchasing this



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holiday. Don't open one box of holiday cookies until the first box is empty (if you end up not eating them, an unopened box can be donated). Put things back on the shelf if that little voice in the back of your head says, "This is more food than we need."

The 24-Hour Rule

We advocate this rule even when it's not the holidays. When you're about to make a purchase that wasn't a "planned" purchase, put it back down and wait twenty-four hours before you buy it. Unless it is a massive clearance sale, the item will still be there a day later. At least half of the time, after a day of reflection, you will realize that you didn't want or need the item that you were about to purchase. You'll have saved yourself money and avoided buying something that would ultimately just lead to clutter in your home!

Thinking Travel Through

Holiday travel is fairly inevitable. However, what's not inevitable is that it is well-planned. Often, in the rush of the holidays we just "have" to go somewhere and we do it in the most efficient way possible. Efficient, however, often means "most expensive." Plan things out and think environmentally. Buy travel tickets and make reservations ahead of time. Choose to stay with family instead of getting hotel rooms. Drive during off-peak hours so that you're not wasting gas sitting in traffic. Just take an hour out of your day to spend some time thinking about the cost associated with holiday travel and how to reduce it. That hour can save you hundreds of dollars.

Use the Internet for Good

We love opening holiday cards as well, but you can save big dollars (and some trees) by sending your holiday greetings electronically. We'll be honest, even for us this is a hard transition to make. After all, cards are a great holiday tradition that makes us feel warm inside. However, if you're really watching your budget and have opinions about the wastefulness of printed cards, then you can use the internet for good.

Of course, there are hundreds of ways to monitor your spending during the holidays, but these are our favorites. Hopefully they'll help you out!



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Step 6

A Socially Responsible Holiday

Of course, we at Postconsumers believe that one of the keys to finding the satisfaction of the holiday spirit is to practice a socially responsible holiday. What's a socially responsible holiday? It's one where we all embrace things that will create peace and joy on earth rather than holes in our wallets or more stacks of stuff in our closets. Here are some ways you may want to consider doing that!

Volunteer Your Time

There are volunteer opportunities all year long, but particularly during the holiday season outreach programs always need volunteers. From delivering meals to seniors to simply helping out at a local food bank or community gathering, the opportunities to give back to your community and those who may be more needy than you are all around you every holiday season. Volunteering doesn't cost you anything except time, but it gives back a feeling of participating in the world that can't be matched.

Donate Your Items

No matter how much you hold back, chances are you will end the holiday season with more "stuff" than you started it with. Help balance the scales by doing a cleaning out of your household items, clothing and other goods before the holiday season and donate them to church or other thrift stores and Goodwill. Your items donated before the holiday season may make the holiday brighter and better for somebody who needs (or prefers) to do their holiday gift shopping at a thrift or Goodwill store this season.

Donations as Gifts

Consider making a pact, instead of exchanging gifts, among your friends or family to donate the money that would have been spent on gifts to a charity or non-profit group in the gift recipient's name. You're doubling the gift of giving – the recipient of the gift gets the satisfaction of knowing that they were responsible for a donation to an important cause and the cause gets much needed financial help.



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Buy Locally

When you do decide that you should buy items, try to buy locally produced objects. In addition to supporting the local economy and craftsmen, you're most likely also buying from more sustainable and local materials and sources.

Be Kind!

Above all, make an effort to be kind this holiday season. The stress of the holiday, even if you're beginning your journey to a Postconsumer holiday, can wear on all of us. Make that extra special effort to be considerate to everybody and spread the holiday cheer!



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Step 7

Review Your “Holiday Project” Success

One item that’s overlooked in almost any type of “self improvement” tips-giving document is the “final review.” In a business, this would be the part of the process where you reviewed your project and decided what were “best practices” to do moving forward and what were things that you would need to improve on in the future. However, your effort to have a Postconsumer holiday can not only be the jumping off point for your incorporating Postconsumer ideas into your daily life all year long, it can also be a system that you use each holiday season to have a happier holiday. However, to make that happen, you’ll want to review your “holiday project” success.

Budget

Firstly, evaluate your budget. Did you go under or go over? If you overspent, where did you guess wrong about how much you would need to spend? Or what habits did you have (such as last-minute shopping) that caused the budget to go out of control? Make notes about what worked and what didn’t with your budget so that you know what adjustments you need to make in the future – to both your budget and your behavior.

Your Satisfaction Action Plan

Next, review the specifics of your Satisfaction Action Plan. We’ll talk about the big picture later, but for now, how many of the things that you said would bring you holiday satisfaction and activities that you identified to bring you that fulfillment were you really able to enjoy and enact? Where did you succeed, and where did you come up short? Did you allow yourself to fall into patterns of “getting busy” and losing sight of what you had originally said would make you happy? Was that “busy” time worth it to you in the end? What changes would you need to make in order to balance out the “busy” with the “happy”?

The Big Picture

Now, just take a minute to reflect on the big picture. How happy were you this holiday season, and what could you have done to make yourself and those



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around you happier? In the end, it's not about how much or how little you bought, it's about whether you found the satisfaction of the holiday.

Group Reviews

If your entire family or you and a group of friends were working on a Postconsumer holiday, then take the time to talk about what you learned. Share things that were hard and things that you would want to keep doing all year long because they succeeded so well.

In short, take a break to look at what you did to try to make your season a Postconsumer holiday and think about what worked and what didn't!



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Bonus Tip

Defining Your New Year

Now that you've made some big (and probably somewhat challenging) changes in how you tackle the holidays, it's time to blaze into the New Year with some equally important goals. We're not saying that you should reduce the total items that you own down to a hundred or less. We're not even saying that you should try to make it an entire year without using your credit cards. However, it is important to head into the next year with a goal of what you want to complete in mind! What's our best, most simple tip for that?

Believe it or not, it's "Get yourself a motto for the year!"

Of course, we think the perfect motto to head into any year is "find the satisfaction of enough," but here are some examples that Postconsumers staffers have used in the past (with 1999 inserted as the year example!):

1999: Finding Fulfillment
1999: Go Deep or Go Home
1999: The Keyword is Calm
1999: This *Is* The Year

The key is to pick a motto that really does sum up what it is that you want to say that you found or accomplished this year, but don't pick one that will be "too big" or that you know you have no hope of looking back on and feeling as though you accomplished it at the end of the year. We're not saying "aim low," but we are saying that nobody ever accomplished unrealistic goals.

Take some time. Write out a number of potential mottos. Think about how you really want to define your year.

Then, as you make decisions and prioritize things throughout the year, let your motto repeat itself in your head.

Trust us. A good motto is the key to a great year!



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We Hope You Have a Very Postconsumer Holiday!

We're not here to tell you how much or how little you should spend or buy this holiday season. We're not saying that presents are wrong or that it's wrong to put extra money aside for the holiday season and then enjoy some excess. What we are saying is that you should be active about deciding for yourself, individually or as a family, what the limits of consumerism are for you this holiday rather than just accepting what society and the media tell you.

You can have a happy holiday with a little or a lot or anywhere in between. It's your right to decide the place on the scale that's right for you. We hope that the information contained in this guide will help you do that these holiday months (and we certainly hope that you'll pass this guide along). We'll all be moving our society beyond addictive consumerism in the process.

However you do it, we hope you have a very happy, healthy and peaceful holiday season and that, in the New Year, you find the satisfaction of enough all over again!



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