From pumpkin spice to peppermint mocha, there's a tangible feel as the seasons change. Yet, for every bit of holiday magic, extra stress and confusion can easily spoil the show. Parties, traditions, food, and scheduling conflicts can add up to a holiday handful. Whether you find yourself dreading or anticipating that annual event, consider these tips to keep your relationships happy and healthy.

• **Pay attention** - Expectations, memories, and drama can easily complicate the season’s joy. Be mindful of your feelings and needs, particularly if you’re in a different situation than last year. Grieving the loss of a loved one, relationship, or job can leave you feeling sad. That’s okay. Even though it’s the holidays, you don’t have to be happy.

• **Be realistic** - Communicate your expectations of others and yourself. Remember, you are only one person. You can only be in one place at a time, bake so many cookies, and spend so much money. Consider scaling things back to enjoy the most from each detail.

• **Prevent stress** - Everyone has that one family member, coworker, or acquaintance that gets on their nerves. Postpone deep or controversial conversations. Stay cordial, stick to small-talk, and form an exit strategy to excuse yourself from a potential disagreement.

• **Say no** - Practice the discipline of saying no to prevent feeling overwhelmed and resentful. Cherish your holiday; say no to the good and yes to the best.

• **Travel solo** - Double-booked with multiple engagements? Consider splitting the events with your partner. Driving separately so one of you can leave early is another alternative. Stand up for your individual needs to strike the perfect holiday balance.

• **Plan** - Reduce last-minute surprises by organizing a plan for who, what, when, and where. Communicate your plans by writing them down or sharing via your favorite mobile device app.

• **Minimize** - Consider limiting your sugar, food, and alcohol intake. Avoid holiday hangovers by cutting back.

No matter what holiday situation arises, practice the art of being polite. Keep scrooge locked away and remember your manners. Say thank you, send a note, or consider a donation to your favorite charity.
All eyes seem to be looking for a strong leader. From the ballot box to the boardroom, we value and praise trustworthy leaders. While leadership skills are critical, they are of little use without followers. Yes, the idea of being a follower is often frowned upon. But think about it: If everyone is a leader, nothing gets done. Talk about a waste of time, energy, and money. Learning to be an effective follower is an invaluable skill that can help you in both your work and personal life.

"FOLLOWERSHIP SKILLS"

So what does it take to be an effective follower? For starters, humility and the ability to be led. Critical thinking skills and active participation are also big components. Other habits effective followers practice are: adaptability, honesty, loyalty, and integrity. Effective followers identify with the goals of the leader and collaborate accordingly.

**BENEFITS OF FOLLOWING**

We spend the majority of our time in groups. Our work, family, friends, and neighborhoods represent some group settings. While we may possess leadership skills, there are countless benefits to developing our "followership skills" as well.

- **Complementarity** - Becoming a good follower is learning how to be an effective team member. In a group setting, everyone has something valuable to bring to the table. Strengths and weaknesses balance out as each individual offers their unique skillset.
- **Community** - Learning best occurs in shared environments. What better way to bond than through laughter or voicing frustrations with your fellow sojourners.

**PEAK PERFORMANCE**

Achieving Goals by Committing to Systems

Are you currently working toward a goal? Temporary or long-term, we all have goals we’ve met and some we’ve “forgotten” about by January 3rd. However, if we’re interested in lasting impacts, perhaps it’s time to re-evaluate how we focus on goals.

**SMART VS. SYSTEM**

The SMART approach to setting goals is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-Based. For example, instead of the vague goal of “losing weight,” a SMART goal would say, “I want to lose 15 pounds by my birthday.” There are tangible benefits to applying this method, since it irons out the details. However, one thing that is not clear is how to reach this goal.

A system approach focuses on the how, or you could say it builds helpful habits on your journey to the destination. When you make the end goal your main focus, it can hold a certain power over you. You might find this motivating, or you might find it yielding a judgmental tone of pass or fail (and you fail until you pass!). Instead of just a SMART goal, consider adding a system approach.

This model wouldn’t focus on losing those 15 pounds by your birthday. Rather it becomes, “I will exercise three times this week,” and “I’ll eat vegetables for lunch every day.” Do you see the difference? Progress over end-results.

**SYSTEM BENEFITS**

Sound like semantics? “Po-tay-to, po-tah-to,” just another way to say the same thing? Perhaps, but the system approach provides a mental shift, breaking targets into smaller-sized commitments that are easy to track and adapt. The meaningful difference between SMART goals and the system process is longevity and long-term change. If you lost the weight by your birthday, do you stop your healthy habits? The system approach would say “Keep eating your veggies and working out!” Do you desire to run a marathon? “Keep running.” Want to write a book? “Stick to a writing schedule.” Open up a successful business? “Focus on consistent marketing.”

The journey doesn’t end when you’ve reached your destination. It continues, moving forward with the habits you’ve acquired while working your system.
Are you currently facing a medical disability leave?

At any given time, a certain percentage of County employees will need to spend some time away from work due to medical conditions that include surgery, rehabilitation or other treatment programs. Being out on a medical disability leave can be challenging. In addition to your treatment, you must coordinate your leave of absence with your boss, administration, human resources and others.

Dealing with the stress of your medical condition is often accompanied by some difficult emotional reactions as well.

Some Common Emotional Reactions:

1. A sense of isolation. You no longer have the structure of work, social contact with your co-workers or contact with the people you serve.

2. Anxiety about your future. You may be asking yourself, will I be able to return to work? What will it be like if I can't return to work?

3. Depressed feelings associated with a sense of loss. You may not be able to participate in previously enjoyed activities.

What To Do?

1. Accept and ask for help. It is common to hesitate, but being honest with caring people can make the difference between despair and hope. Make it easy for those who ask to help. Be willing to say, “It would help to get a ride to the doctor or grocery store.”

2. Be open to any silver lining. When you struggle with medical issues, you may be surprised about the people who show up and are there for you.

3. Down time can facilitate healing as long as you manage anxieties. Take advantage of the breathing space to focus on you. It can be a great time to reflect and ask yourself, “What is really important to me?”

4. Join a support group to connect with others facing a similar disability.

5. Consider reaching out to the County of Santa Clara's Employee Assistance program (EAP). You and eligible family members may receive up to 5 free counseling sessions per calendar year. These confidential counseling sessions offer you a safe place to discuss your unique worries and concerns. An EAP professional can help address the emotional stress of your medical issues, reduce your sense of isolation and provide support during this difficult time in your life.

The County of Santa Clara's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a labor-management sponsored, confidential, professional resource that provides counseling, assessment and referral services to County employees and their families who want help in solving personal and/or work-related problems.

When people are suffering from problems, it is easy to lose perspective. Life may seem confused and difficult for a time. Work performance may be negatively affected. If you have any questions or to schedule a counseling appointment, please call EAP at (408) 241-7772.
Who do you most admire? Do you regularly achieve what you want? Have you thought about the legacy you’ll leave? If these sound like mature, adult questions, it might surprise you to know you began forming these answers in childhood.

**POPULAR BELIEF PATTERNS**

As young children, we began to form our personal identity by observing our place in the world around us. We then made conclusions about behavior, attitude, and ourselves. While this process is perfectly normal, it can become problematic when these beliefs go unchallenged and lead to distorted perceptions of reality in adulthood. Some examples are:

- I can’t do things on my own.
- I have to be perfect for people to like me.
- I’m not smart enough to do what I’d really like.
- I am/am not _____________ (you fill in the blank).

**DEVELOPING YOUR PERSONAL IDENTITY**

If you’re unsatisfied with how you view yourself and the world around you, you can work toward shaping a clear personal identity that can lead you to your desired vision of life. If your identity is shaped by external circumstances – like wealth, attractiveness, or a relationship status – your perceived value can flip in an instant. A better and more stable choice is to base your personal identity on values and principles that you can actively control. Here are a few steps to help you discover and develop your personal identity:

- **Choose** - Pick five values you desire to emulate in your life.
- **Identify** - Determine what each value means to you. If you desire an honest life, write down what an honest life looks like to you. Try to be as specific as possible.
- **Determine** - Consider how your choices contribute to or minimize that value. Learn from your past to help direct your future.
- **Practice** - Incorporate your new values into daily actions. For instance, if you want to be trustworthy, ask yourself, “What would it look like to be trustworthy in this situation?”
- **Repeat** - Work your plan and review as needed.