

PUT A FORK IN HOLIDAY OVERWHELM

ENDING THE STRESS BEFORE IT BEGINS

PJ McClure



Put A Fork In Holiday Overwhelm!

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“...so that I may come to you with joy and be refreshed
in your company...”

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Ending The Stress Before It Ever Stars

By PJ McClure

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	5
Chapter 1 It's The Happiest Season Of All.....	7
Chapter 2 Where The Overwhelm Comes From.....	12
Chapter 3 Break Down The Cloud.....	16
Chapter 4 Planning Ahead.....	21
Chapter 5 What Happens Along The Way.....	25

Put A Fork In Holiday Overwhelm!

PJ McClure

Introduction

No one ever plans to be overwhelmed. Sure, we might get so used to it happening around certain times of the year that we just accept it's going to happen, but we don't PLAN to be overwhelmed.

With that in mind, I began targeting the whole idea of overwhelm with my coaching clients more than a decade ago. Fortunately for me, what we found together was both simple and effective.

I consider that fortunate because that means I don't have to be overly smart and the solution is likely to work for everyone. Win-win!

So whether you are someone that experiences just a little stress with the holiday season or you go into a full-on melt down this time of year, I'm confident the contents of this book will give you the tools to make this year the best yet.



As you read, I invite you to come to social media and ask me any questions you have. I'll be there to answer them myself. I'm looking forward to your holiday success stories!

Twitter: [@PJMcClure](#)

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Be your best,

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PJ McClure

Dedicated to Grandma Anita, who fills every holiday with the sights, smells, and emotions that fill the rest of us with joy unspeakable.

Put A Fork In Holiday Overwhelm!

PJ McClure

Chapter 1

It's The Happiest Season Of All!

Just like clock-work, every year on the day after Thanksgiving, my mom would start pulling out boxes of decorations. With the precision and cunning of a 4-star General, she would begin distributing supplies and assignments for our mission.

Decorate the house for Christmas!

To really kick things off, she would pull out the Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby, Perry Como and Andy Williams Christmas albums. Yes, I said albums.

All day long those guys sang to us of every holiday joy imaginable. I can still hear Andy crooning, "*It's the happiest season of all.*"

In my little world, there were few things better than the stretch on the calendar from the fourth thursday in November to the 2nd of January. It represented everything right in the world.

Family I seldom saw would be around. We would play games and watch football. Everyone seemed in a little merrier mood than normal and foods that I didn't see for the entire rest of the year were in abundant supply! Yes...life was *very* good.

And for the record, it wasn't an easy time of year for me as a kid. My parents had divorced when I was three, so with both of them remarried, my family obligations

Put A Fork In Holiday Overwhelm!

PJ McClure

increased instantly. I spent almost as much time in a car, going from one part of my ever-extending family to another, as I did in the houses sometimes.

It never failed that I would miss something, somewhere, that everyone at that house would be talking about for years to come. Even those bits of disappointment could not dampen my spirits though. This was the best time of the year!

Opening Gifts And My Eyes

As the years went by and my family grew even more complicated, I began to notice things about how others reacted to my cherished season. Much to my dismay, it wasn't the same as me.

Conversations about certain family members who were *"always such a bore"* or *"thought they were better than everyone else."* Noticing how a few family members seemed to watch the clock a little closer than everyone else and always made an exit as quickly as possible.

Maybe the worst was starting to see that some of the people closest to me would have significant change in mood and attitude from November until way into January, and it wasn't a favorable mood change!

How could it be that this amazing season could bring anyone down?!

Put A Fork In Holiday Overwhelm!

PJ McClure

Finally, during the first holiday season together with my wife, I began to feel what had stolen some of the joy from others for so long. *Not my wife, mind you!* Good grief...don't take that the wrong way. You see, her parents are divorced also. So instead of one incredibly complicated holiday schedule, we had two.

Now the season, which was once full of working hard to see everyone as much as possible, was introduced to real compromise. It was not realistic, or maybe even possible, for us to get to every family gathering. We had to be the *bad guys* at times by deciding to do Thanksgiving one place and Christmas another.

Maybe the 6-8 potential gatherings for either holiday, we could only make five. No matter how hard we tried, it seemed like someone got their feelings hurt.

Deciding where to go was one thing. Planning the travel schedule to do it was another. Multiply that stress with trying to keep up with who would be at each place, if we were able to buy presents for everyone or at least their kids.

Our ability to budget was pretty stinky at the time so this always caused massive amounts of stress, especially when we worked hard to get it all together and either forgot someone or an unexpected person showed up.

Finally we multiply the complications with friends, work parties and the completely unreasonable desire to

Put A Fork In Holiday Overwhelm!

PJ McClure

spend time alone as a married couple. Don't even get me started on the shift that happened when we had kids!

Before long, I ran the risk of looking forward more to August (the only month without any American holidays) than my precious holiday season. What was going on?!

What's Really Cooking

In the last several years of working through some of these same issues with clients, I have seen patterns and similarities regarding how most of us deal with stressful times. Even more, how we often create or magnify stressful events ourselves, then let them dictate to us how we act.

The most common word and sentiment used to describe what happens to us when stress meets this season is **HOLIDAY OVERWHELM.**

We all know the phrase and think we know what it means, but do we know how to deal with it? In these next few pages, we're going to expose holiday overwhelm, how it steals our joy, and dismantle it forever!

Don't believe the lie that the holiday season has to be full of stress and overwhelm. It doesn't. You can take control of yourself and that is all it takes to make this *the hap-happiest season of all!!*

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PJ McClure

Chapter 2

Where The Overwhelm Comes From?

I have seriously lost count of the number of times I hear the phrase, “*I’m just so overwhelmed*” when working with a coaching client. The craziest part about it is, we are always talking about something that could be bringing them joy and progress.

When the holidays approach, you can almost see people digging their overwhelm bunker and preparing for the pressure. How can normally, well-adjusted and productive people *go nuts* just because of the season?

There are a few different factors involved, but the first one is always amped up emotions. You might feel the urge to push back against me on this one because a lot of people do. “*How can something so real be only an emotion?*” Let’s look.

First, the definition: **Overwhelm** is a verb (action word) that means *to bury or drown beneath a huge mass*. So what is the huge holiday mass we are drowning beneath? Under what are we being buried?

- 🍷 Events we are expected to attend
- 🍷 Events we are invited to so we feel obligated
- 🍷 Events we are expected to or want to host
- 🍷 Considering the relationships we have with the people who will be at the events
- 🍷 Memories of holidays past (good and bad)
- 🍷 Old patterns of behavior trying to come out
- 🍷 Worry about overeating and blowing our diet

Put A Fork In Holiday Overwhelm!

PJ McClure

- 🍷 Who will we buy gifts for
- 🍷 Will we go into debt for gifts and travel
- 🍷 Fighting feelings of loneliness
- 🍷 Navigating work parties and their issues
- 🍷 Feeling completely unprepared for everything

If we were in a room of 10 people we could make this list go on for pages. Once we were all done though, something would emerge, just as it does on this abbreviated list. All of these things are *in our minds*.

This is the biggest realization we need regarding holiday overwhelm and how to tear it down forever. Each and every issue we lump into our overwhelm bundle is first an issue of the mind and secondly an issue of what emotion we attach to it.

All of these and many more are purely based on what we expect will happen and how we plan to react to it. We will tackle that thought process in a moment, but first I want to show you the real source of overwhelm.

If you owned every one of these things in the list, it would be very easy to claim a state of overwhelm. You might tell me, *“I’m just so overwhelmed with the holidays!”*

To which I would ask, *“What is so overwhelming?”*

The answer I get 99.9% of the time is, *“Well...EVERYTHING!”*

Here’s where we expose the problem. As soon as you tell me any answer that involves the words *everything*,

Put A Fork In Holiday Overwhelm!

PJ McClure

all, everyone, or any other sweeping generalization, I know we can fix it.

Overwhelm is never about one thing or even two. Overwhelm happens when we allow all of the things that are looming to lump together into one big, ominous cloud. Remember the definition?

...to bury or drown beneath a huge mass



We can't be buried or drown beneath *one* thing! To be overwhelmed with the holidays we have to be buried or drowned beneath ALL of the things we have nerves, anxiety or stress about. To do that we have to let them join forces to create a mass huge enough to drown us!

It's the difference between someone throwing a cup of water in your face and being crushed by a tidal wave! To beat holiday overwhelm, we must dismantle the crushing wave and break up the cloud.

Put A Fork In Holiday Overwhelm!

PJ McClure

We are going to breakdown the holiday picture for you and take you from overwhelmed to in-control. Ideally, you will also go from anxious to joyous. Your joy is what I want to give back to you.

With the guidance and questions ahead, you are going to clear the cloud by identifying all of the individual pieces so they can't band together and intimidate you any more.

Before we start, I need you to consider a question and give yourself a truthful answer. **Do you really want to end the holiday overwhelm?**

"Of course I do!" you might be thinking, and that's great if it's true. What I know from experience with 1,000s of people from all walks of life though is this; some people have a piece of their identity in being overwhelmed.

If you are overwhelmed every year, there is also an excuse or place hide. Complaining is expected and you seldom lack a partner in misery to share all the gloom.

When you decide to end this madness and reclaim your joy, you will stand out and could make some of the gatherings a little unusual because people will have to adjust to this new you. That has a stress of its own but it is *sooo worth it!* If you're up for it, press on.

Put A Fork In Holiday Overwhelm!

PJ McClure

Chapter 3

Break Down The Cloud

To get rid of this looming cloud we know as holiday overwhelm, we must first be willing to look at the cloud directly. Our first challenge is to identify and name each



of the individual pieces that make up the big cloud and make them smaller, more manageable clouds.

First, instead of calling this **The Holiday Season**, let's look at the actual days. You may celebrate different holidays during this time than I do so name yours and it still works fine. For me, I need to acknowledge that

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PJ McClure

there are only three actual days to contend with. Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Eve.

That's it! *Three days and they get called a season.*

Typically there are 34-40 days from American Thanksgiving to New Year's Eve and three days fill everyone's vision.

I've seen people all but shut down life during *the holidays* because of overwhelm. No matter how many days are involved in your holiday plans, name them.

This year, for example, we have the Saturday before Thanksgiving with my mom and step-dad and then Thanksgiving Day at our house with my dad and step-mother, my grandma, my wife's dad, mom and step-father, and variety of other family and friends.

Christmas involves the Day, the Eve and the Saturday before to cover everyone we'll be seeing. Add in two separate parties we've decided to go to and we're covered.

New Year's Eve is a big event for us this year because we'll be at a large gathering. All totaled, that's eight days we need to consider in our plans.

Yes, there are other things going on, but this is the first step. Each step we take from here breaks it down further. Our goal is to see each piece for what it is and to assign it's proper place. With that kind of perspective we can manage our emotions much better and tell each piece what role it plays in the holiday picture.

Let's continue this breakdown that *prevents* breakdowns (clever, huh?) and look at some more categories to get

Put A Fork In Holiday Overwhelm!

PJ McClure

your thinking. With each one, list what makes sense for you and be as specific as you can. It really helps.

Categories for consideration

Days: What are the actual days/dates you will engage in a holiday or holiday activity? This could include meals, parties, plays and play practices, or volunteer work.

Travel: Where will you go on these days? Do you spend time at a resort or at a family member's house? Which days involve overnight stays and which are day trips?

Event Types: What ones are you invited to? Which ones will you attend and which would you prefer not to attend? What are you bringing (if anything) to the event? Are you hosting an event and will others be expecting to bring things?

Hosted Events: Are there special arrangements to be made? Have you given the attendees an expectation of the event?

Money: What is your budget for gifts? What is your budget for event food, decorations and entertainment? Have you accounted for travel money?

Eating: Do you have a specialized diet? Are you bringing your own food to an event? Does the host know it? Are you allowing yourself an indulgence for an event? (Special note: Just because you eat extra on one or two days does not mean you scrap your whole nutrition plan until after the first of the year. Be smart. Be disciplined.)

Relationships: Are there people you are anticipating problems with? Are there people you want to make sure

Put A Fork In Holiday Overwhelm!

PJ McClure

you spend time with? How can you prepare to make the best of either situation?

These are only a few of the potential situations you can uncover upfront, but they will get your mind wrapped around the idea that each is only ONE piece and not enough to overwhelm you. Our main objective is to keep them broken up into individual pieces so they can be handled one at a time.

By looking at each individually we can be more objective and keep the emotions at a minimum. When you feel the old patterns of holiday overwhelm creeping back in, remind yourself of which issue you are dealing with right now. Call it by name and put your attention there. When you're done, move on to the next.

With the cloud successfully cleared, we can take the next step of putting a plan in place to get the maximum enjoyment possible from a season designed for joy. That's a good thing!

Here's the disclaimer... It still requires work. Don't worry though, you have it in no time!

Put A Fork In Holiday Overwhelm!

PJ McClure

Chapter 4

Planning Ahead

A well thought out and faithfully executed plan is overwhelm's worst enemy. When we take the time to look ahead and put together our strategy for holiday fulfillment, holiday overwhelm has no place to grow.

Before we can start laying our individual pieces into our calendar, it's important to know why we are doing it. This isn't something I can tell you.

Each of us needs to establish our reasons for doing what we plan to do. There are so many variables involved for each of us, you really need to uncover it on your own. To help though, I'd like to tell you a story you might relate to about a client of mine.

For years, I listened to people lament the inevitable result of the gathering and then ask themselves, "*Why do I even go to these things?*"

Finally, I made someone answer the question. It wasn't my best move as a coach, but my client Karen happened to ask herself that question in my presence on a day that I felt a little irritable...

"*Yeah,*" I asked, "*why do you go?*"

The stunned silence was almost comical. "*Um. What do you mean, 'why?'*"

"*If it is so miserable, why do you continue to go?*"

"*Because it's family and I have to go.*"

Put A Fork In Holiday Overwhelm!

PJ McClure

“First of all, no you don’t. You choose to go. Secondly, why do you go? What do you hope to get out of it?”

The answer to that question is where my point really is.

Regardless of how you would answer that question, the underlying result is always the same. When we have a purpose going into an event, our chances of receiving a sense of fulfillment from the event increase dramatically. Without a purpose, we give up all power to influence the outcome.

Let’s say that your answer to the question above was something like Karen’s, *“I go because having our family together is important to my mom and like to do my part to make her happy.”*

In that case, your purpose for going is to; focus your energy on your mom and doing what you can to make her happy. Imagine how much easier it would be to enjoy yourself if that was the only thing you needed accomplish? You control the outcome because it is all within your being.

- 🍌 You’re doing your part. (not fretting over your lazy uncle)
- 🍌 You’re focusing on your mom. (not your sister’s monstrous children)
- 🍌 You’re purpose is centered in love.

All the other junk falls away when purpose guides your actions. The attitudes of others are their responsibility, not yours. Your entire time there is spent fulfilling what

Put A Fork In Holiday Overwhelm!

PJ McClure

you intend to get out of it. As a result, you enhance everyone else's experience by default.

Something to pay attention to in this example is how you gauge success. Your purpose is to do *your* part to make your mom happy. Not *to make* your mom happy. Her emotional state is not your responsibility and to make it your goal is a set up for failure. Be satisfied to do your part and allow the rest to happen as it will. Be clear about your purpose.

Karen's clearly defined purpose for attending her family function did more than make it tolerable.

"More than one of my siblings commented that this was the best time they remembered since we were kids. I didn't say a word, except to agree.

There is no doubt that my attitude had an impact on everyone else though. After the first couple of things happened that would normally send me over the edge, I just let them go and stuck to my purpose. Everyone else seemed to follow suit."

How can something as simple as purpose make that big of a difference? The same way something as simple as a compass can guide sailors across an ocean. It provides an internal guide that stays true no matter what is happening on the outside.

If a storm covers the stars and brings 50-foot waves up to block your view, grab the wheel and steer by the compass.

When the storm subsides, and it always does, you're still on course and farther along. In the meantime, all of

Put A Fork In Holiday Overwhelm!

PJ McClure

those that set out without a compass crash against rocks or are scrambling in a panic to figure out where they are.

So I want you to ask yourself, “*What is my purpose for these holidays?*” You should even ask it for each event you plan to attend or host. Let your purpose guide what you decide.

For example, if my wife and I decide that our general purpose these holidays is *to give our kids an opportunity to understand the true meaning of these days and let them connect with great holiday traditions*, we will choose events, people and more based on that purpose. If something comes up that doesn’t fit or is a conflict with something that does, we have less of a problem deciding what to do.

As you look at the individual pieces of your holiday puzzle, consider them against the backdrop of your purpose. What fits, what doesn’t? Which pieces are more important to your purpose? Give them a high priority.

Take the highest priority pieces and put them in the calendar first. Make sure to allow for travel time or any other factors involved. Then work your way down the priority list. It’s like plotting your course on a map.

As it comes together you will have a more accurate picture of what this time of year will look like for you and more importantly, you’ll know why it looks that way. Now it’s just a matter of putting one foot in front of the other and the holidays are yours!

Put A Fork In Holiday Overwhelm!

PJ McClure

Inevitably, there are things that pop up. Use your purpose to determine how to treat them. Does it add or subtract? Make good decisions and don't look back.

Put A Fork In Holiday Overwhelm!

PJ McClure

Chapter 5

What Happens Along The Way?

So you're on your way! The cloud isn't scary anymore because it has been identified as a collection of little things, not one big thing that can harm you. You've broken it down to the individual pieces and named them all, like little pets, and have given each of them their space in your calendar and life.

The attacks of overwhelm have subsided because even the unexpected things are met by a purpose-filled plan. You move through days with a new sense of refreshment and accomplishment. This is good stuff! Let's make sure we keep it that way.

Self-care

A very common contributor to overwhelm is a lack of self-care. Even when we recognize holiday overwhelm for the phony that it is, we can still lose sight of how to keep ourselves healthy.

Sometimes, there is a tendency to celebrate this new-found control and power by pushing harder and doing even more than before. This is defeating the purpose of ending overwhelm because we still weaken ourselves unnecessarily.

One of the first pieces of effective self-care is our ability to say 'No' to some of the invitations or possibilities. This allows us room to breathe and even oversee our family's ability to stay healthy.

Put A Fork In Holiday Overwhelm!

PJ McClure

An often overlooked but crucial element is sleep. Don't forget your need for it and please don't give me that bit about, "*I'll sleep when I'm dead.*" If you aren't careful, that will be sooner than you think or you'll wish it was coming quicker.

Nutrition choices are especially important this time of year because of the number of options not normally available. Enjoy the treats, but be on the lookout for healthier choices and don't over do it.

The motto of moderation applies to alcohol too. Old patterns or generational behaviors might want to take over here. I've never met anyone that had a purpose of getting smashed and making a fool of themselves. Not to mention the beautiful hangover... If you drink alcohol, be prudent and use good discretion.

A final note on self-care is to lavish tons of grace and forgiveness everywhere you go. Refuse to pick up offenses or hurts and do your part to forgive and lay down all past grudges. Don't let this cancerous behavior eat you alive.

Keep notes

Year after year, I'm met with something that truly baffles me. I watch grown men and women throw their arms in the air, frustrated to exhaustion, and exclaim, "*The holidays just snuck up on me this year!*"

With all due respect...how does THAT happen?! Every year of my life, these holidays have been on a pretty regular schedule. How is it possible for an inanimate day on a calendar to *sneak up* on you?

Put A Fork In Holiday Overwhelm!

PJ McClure

The quick answer is the best, I think. We put our heads down, get caught up in life and never look up to plan ahead. We refuse to engage a time that is historically overwhelming until forced.

With no time to spare, it is difficult to be *proactive* so we result to *reaction* in everything. Make a commitment this year to benefit yourself next year.

As you walk through each step we've covered here, make notes. When you get done with an event, sit down and make a few notes about what worked, what didn't and what you would like to do different.

Note where certain gatherings were held. What dish did you bring and what was a real hit? Make sure to make someone's day next year and specifically request their dish again! Wow! How popular would you be?

What gifts did you give and receive? What plans for the next year were discussed? Write them down and take the pressure off of everyone.

Reflect for next year

As the season wraps up (for me that is the first week of the new year), sit down and reflect on the season as a whole. How did it go? Where you able to stick to your guns and really honor your purpose?

What did you learn and how can it impact next year's season?

Remember in this time that you aren't grading yourself so much as honoring the work you've done by evaluating the results. Make some notes for next year

Put A Fork In Holiday Overwhelm!

PJ McClure

and put a date on your calendar to start this process again next year. Give yourself a head-start for change!

Above all else, please remember what this is really about. Holidays are actually Holy Days. Each one has an underlying reason for its existence that is much deeper and more significant than eating, shopping, and gifts.

Our arguments, pride and pettiness should always fall harmless to the ground as we consider the real meanings. In a time designed for joy, but riddled with angst, can we be place of refreshment for others? I believe, yes.

Conclusion

This conversation doesn't have to end here! I really want to see you have an amazing life and to put a fork in holiday overwhelm! If you have come out of this with a question, come ask me.

What would you like to tell me regarding the content of this book?

Please come find me on Facebook at <http://FB.com/PJMcClurebiz> or Twitter at <http://Twitter.com/PJMcClure> and share your thoughts, breakthroughs, and requests. I'll be there to answer you personally and really want to hear your stories.

Be your best,

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Romans 15:32

<http://PJMcClure.com>