



ITS ALL ABOUT PEOPLE

## The real sanity clause

**By Stuart White**  
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So how was it for you? The year, I mean. How would you put it, all things considered, on a scale of 1 to 10? Isn't that what we should all be asking ourselves this week or is it just party time and mistletoe and wine that's on your mind? You can't deny there is something about the holidays that makes us feel so much more grateful, happier and even giddy with anticipation. Defences come down, resistance is low, we throw caution to the wind, spend more than we should, eat more than we should and kiss relatives that we don't much like and have shunned the last 12 months. It really is the most wonderful time of the year.

But what I really enjoy about this period is the forced break. Even if most of us wanted to carry on working we wouldn't be able to...cos there would be no one to play the game with, so to speak. Anyone who does try to work through can only show up and put in a few token hours because everyone else has clocked off, if not physically then at least psychologically and it's no bad thing. The forced break is our time to unlearn how we have been living for the past few months. We have to re-programme ourselves to remember how to relax. We are so accustomed to being busy, hectic, crazy fast paced life and take it for granted and don't really view it as problematic. But, when you take them away you realise how integral they are to your life. You start to see how stressed you have been, how stressed the family has been and how difficult it can be to become, dare I say it, normal again; living without rushing, having time to ponder, reflect, chill out, throw out the schedule and take stock of who we are and what we have achieved.

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But the festive season is known as a menacing period, psychologically-speaking, because all the time to reflect can work against us when we start to focus on unresolved emotional conflicts, loneliness and all our other latent problems. I think that whether positive or negative, this time of year will always be an emotional one because it's the one time that we stop to listen to ourselves and just 'be'. We become human again and not the work-churning beavers we are Monday to Friday, throughout the rest of the year. Sticking our heads in the sand and burying ourselves with business and busy-ness is a great way not to deal with the real you but when that's taken away we might not like what's left and that's when problems arise. You re-discover 'me' but find you don't like that real person or your real situation very much.

Like me you have probably heard that the suicide rate goes up during the festive season and that it can trigger an alarming rise in psychiatric emergencies and suicide. That the joy that other people experience during the holidays drives home the hopelessness of the situation to someone who is alone in the world. All the merriment, happiness and ho, ho, hos just highlight to the less fortunate what they don't have and as a result the whole thing comes tumbling down in a great depressive, self-revealing slump and the only way out is to end it all.

According to recent evidence, though, holiday depression is about as real as Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer himself and is a notion that is unfounded despite it having been around forever. One of the largest studies to examine seasonal trends in suicide and psychiatric problems found no increase around the Christmas holidays. In fact there is evidence to suggest that depressive periods are below average during actual holiday time itself. However, one group of researchers did discover an increase of suicides on New Year's Day and attributed this to people becoming depressed because it is perceived as the official end of the holiday period and, wait for it, that the prospect of returning to work and everyday life is just too unbearable.

So if you are feeling less than festive this season you can't blame it on the time of year – that's a myth. It's having the time to look back and finding that you don't much like what you see. And if that's the case try looking inwards instead and try to discover why. Look for the good and allow it to come to the fore, find your own inner peace and make sure that you start to live your life the way that you are supposed to January through December, and not the way society tries to dictate. Know that there's a year-long balance between work, home, family and friends, not just something that can only be scheduled in over Christmas and New Year, that despite what the carol says, it's not only Christmas that should bring tidings of comfort and joy, even if that's the only time you have to truly stop and think about it. That way you might even find a bit of that elusive festive spirit lurking somewhere deep inside, not just at the bottom of a glass!

Agree or disagree with this? Don'ts twitter amongst yourselves – tweet your chirps to [http://twitter.com/Stuart Botswana](http://twitter.com/Stuart_Botswana)

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