

The skull blisteri



ng pace of change, stressful change especially, rattled far too many of our lives this year. My antidote, at least partial solution, is a surge in what we Americans do best. That's right, shopping. But not that window shopping stuff. I'm talking actual *spending*.

As a nation, we must be the spending champs since personal consumption expenditures represent about 70% of our huge (\$17 trillion or so) GDP, at least if you include government spending on health care. Such as grandpa's priceless hip replacement that Medicare paid for. And we shined over the Thanksgiving holiday, with \$10.4B spent in retail stores and another \$2.7B on-line just on Black Friday. Ka-ching.

At the all-important *moi* level, Americans said they planned to spend \$132 on themselves this year—so called “self-gifting.” Heather Long, CNN money markets and investing editor, says

“It's become so acceptable that the number of people admitting they are doing it has nearly doubled in the past two year
s, according to research by Stored Value Solutions, a company that runs gift card programs.”

So let's just go ahead and splurge, spend our way on great stuff toward stress relief and happiness. To illustrate how blissfully easy this can be, I simply selected one holiday season catalogue from the piles coming to our mailbox, at random. Also at random, I picked out several products for sale that were advertised therein. Wherein, you ask? *The*

Sharper Image

, the handy dandy roadmap to gizmo-land, along with tougher to spell Hammacher Schlemmer of course. In so doing, please note that I bypassed going out on a limb with dreamed up (by me) future-land products. Really cool stuff, such as my “Brain-Away” do it yourself head transplant kit (hey, what could possibly go wrong?), based on the research of neurosurgeon Dr. Sergio Canavero (

Director of the Turin Advanced Neuromodulation Group, “a think tank devoted to the advancement of brain stimulation”)

as summarized in The Week magazine in their 12/4/15 issue. Maybe next year for that sort of thing, after more of us are ready to look for a new head after another season of jarring election politics.

So alright already, here is the random sample of Sharper Image products. Grab that \$132 self-gifting fund we supposedly earmarked and let's start ka-chinging.

1. Keep your coffee "pleasantly hot" with the **Retro Heated Travel Mug**. It features a temperature gauge (!) that shows precisely how hot your coffee or tea is before you grab that first sip. "Best of all, it plugs into your car's cigarette lighter to keep it [the drink, not your car!] deliciously hot for your whole commute—up to 160 degrees!... Features On/Off switch [yikes!], ready light, non-skid rubber base and sealable lid with sliding sip closure." And hey, your choice of colors, as long as it's black or red but why not get both since they're only \$49.99 apiece? Can't you just feel that stress fading away?

2. Be a media whiz with the **Rapid Slide and Negative Converter**. This little \$160 beauty (you can borrow the other \$28, right?) "gives your old media new life as digital files... without a computer! It has a 14 megapixel CMOS [complementary metal-oxide semiconductor] sensor that turns slides and standard 35mm film negatives into high-res (3000 dpi) JPEG files." Plugs into an AC outlet or uses 4 AA batteries. Whoa *baby*, it even has an LCD color screen. Before you know it, folks, you'll be flipping and adjusting images every which way, then downloading them to "any computer." Are your fingers (uh, digits) itching yet ladies and gentlemen?

3. And in this corner, for only \$150 (right, borrow the piddling \$18 this time), we have **Noise Canceling Bluetooth Headphones**

. Yes, they're rechargeable, combining two "amazing" audio features in a single "awesome" design. These babies reduce ambient noise "like chattering co-workers [or politicians] and jet engine hum" AND let you enjoy your favorite music without pesky cords. They pair with your other gadgets like iPhones and iPads or, can you *stand* it folks, use the headphones *without music*

to read, work or just "relax in peace and quiet." Why, you can even do all this while sipping that nice hot coffee you stored in your new Travel Mug!

4. Still beating up your tired feet and legs? Well now you can kick back with the **Foot and Leg Spa**

, another bargain at \$170. With arthritic ankles, this is right up my alley: "The Foot and Leg Spa soaks away your tension with calf-deep water and two [count 'em] hydro jets that massage and stimulate the reflex zones of your feet. Just fill the 14" tub with warm water and flip it on." Two

submerged rollers combine with “invigorating” air bubbles and adjustable heat to provide a relaxing “spa-like experience.” You heard it here, folks, “spa-like.”

5. Spurred on by your happy feet, you can slug your way to ballpark-style hotdogs with your **All-Star**

Hot Dog Maker

, a real bargain for only \$70. (Sorry, hotdogs not included.) Pretend you’re at the big game—or your favorite gas station—and enjoy this not so teeny wienie appliance. It readies hot dogs “the perfect way” each and every time, “thanks to its five heated stainless steel rollers.” Of course it comes with a built-in bu

n warmer and crumb trays. And naturally this little winner plugs into an AC outlet. So take your finger out that kitchen socket and have at it!

6. Okay, last one for now, fabulous **Cube Lights**. Your feet are happy, you’ve got a stadium hotdog in one hand and a mug of perfect hot coffee in the other. Betcha want to see what else is going on. Well now you can! “These compact and portable LED cube lights give you a wide range of lighting options for virtually any situation.” (Including, presumably, when you’re so stressed out that you hair catches fire.) “From gentle night light to color-changing mood light to powerful outdoor lantern, you’ll love having them around for any indoor or outdoor setting.” That pretty much covers all settings, right?

Whew, I’ve got to take a break here. This is some pretty darned smart spending, the near perfect way to start ringing (er, make that ka-chinging) in the New Year.

In closing, if I may quote from the *Wall Street Journal*, “Wealth alone doesn’t provide any guarantee of a good life. What matters a lot more than a big income is

how people spend it.

For instance, giving money away makes people a lot happier than lavishing it on themselves. And when they do spend money on themselves, people are a lot happier when they use it for experiences like travel than for material goods.”

Fair enough and I think I’ve got that covered. We can just buy all those cool gadgets for family and friends and suggest that they take them along when they travel. And if they’re really open minded about suggestions, how about we drop them little hints about all the new stuff we’d love to have them bring back to us from their trips? Fine art, classy jewelry, maybe just some hot dogs.

Ka-Chinging in the New Year

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What better way to start off the New Year? Ka-ching, everybody!

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