



Project Holiday: Make a Goal to Have Your Best Holiday Season Yet

by Amy Knebel

Remember the last time you planned for, worked on and completed a project? Satisfying, wasn't it? You felt a lingering sense of accomplishment, right? Imagine having a holiday season that you look back on with a smile instead of a sigh.

If you dread yet another hectic and tiring holiday season - not only in your store, but in your personal life as well - you are not alone. One solution is to think of the holiday season as a project and employ some of the same ideas that professional project managers use to deliver quality results on budget and on time.

Project managers generally follow steps such as goal setting, planning, executing and monitoring progress while taking into consideration constraints such as time, quality, resources and

budget. Some of these very same ideas can fit your advanced approach to the holiday season.

Here's how to start your Project Holiday now so you can enjoy the fruit of your efforts when it counts the most:

Begin With the End in Mind and Have a Goal for the Holiday Season

Effective project managers establish a clearly defined goal before they begin and then plan backwards in time from that goal. So, think backwards and first establish what you want your holidays to be. Are you traveling or staying local? Are you hosting the big holiday gathering in your home? Which traditions will you recycle or is it time to start new traditions? Once you envision what you want your Project Holiday to resemble, you can then list and effectively plan what needs to happen to make that vision a reality.

Clean Up Your Calendar and Schedule Down Time

Project managers live and die by their timelines, and the next step will ensure you have ample time to execute your Project Holiday. Look far ahead on your calendar and figure out when the holidays begin for you and when they end. Sometimes far-flung family and work schedules mean that the holidays start before Thanksgiving and often don't end until after the New Year. After you have established the "bookends" to your holiday season, you can then schedule dates for parties, travel, shopping, decorating, baking...whatever you've planned for you goal.

Project managers also eliminate impediments to reaching their goal on time, and so should you. Since the holidays are busy enough without the added stress of time spent at doctor or dentist appointments, resist the temptation to take advantage of the time away from work or the kids' school holidays. Schedule those routine appointments for another time of year. Instead, use that time reconnecting with yourself, friends and family.

If you do a lot of shipping and mailing, consider the dates that are traditionally busiest for the postal service and shipping companies and set your drop-dead dates for sending things out.

And finally, pencil in time to rest and recharge. If each day in your holiday season is packed with multiple activities, that's a signal that you need to make space for yourself.

Firmly Identify Your Holiday Budget

Ah... money... the reality speedbump on our way to holiday happiness. Good project managers, however, establish a budget and stick to it. Your best bet is to set an initial budget amount divided (gifts, travel, entertainment, etc.) by what you're comfortable spending for each category. Then, after you've really thought through what it will cost to realize your holiday goal, revisit each category and tweak your numbers accordingly. Want to avoid going over-budget? Plan for a 10 % "slush fund," that is, earmark 10 % of your budget for pop-up surprises.

At all costs, avoid going into debt. The stress of looming bills dampens the holiday joy. Some people find saving all year an effective way to have the money already in the bank when the holidays start. Find a money management plan that works for you.

Focus, Simplify and Develop a Signature Holiday Style

The best project managers eliminate extraneous work and simplify routines and procedures to stay on track. In the same

vein, drop anything that has the potential to make you crazy or sidetrack you from your goal. Liberate yourself from the preconceived notion of what the holidays should look like. If holiday cards stress you out, don't send them. Substitute an email blast with a short slideshow of the year's highlights. Rather than buying personal gifts for family or friends, schedule of a fun experience you can share and "give" that to everyone. Ditch the holiday-themed china that takes up precious storage space and use everyday white plates with holiday inspired table décor instead.

Think simple, think one of everything and develop some signature style moves. Instead of baking eight different kinds of cookies, pick the most delicious cookie that you (yes, you!) love and make that the only cookie you bake and give. That is now your signature cookie - own it! Apply this same logic to other areas that can use streamlining. Choose one color of wrapping paper and complimentary ribbon for all gifts. Settle on a signature holiday cocktail to serve guests. Have a lot of small gifts to give? Pick a signature gift with universal appeal from a favorite indie retailer. These signature moves will keep you organized and save time and money in the long run.

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A good deal of project management deals with managing supplies and finding multiple uses for the same thing. Before buying

anything, take the time to inventory what you already have and what can be repurposed. Things like plain white table linens require very little decoration to make them holiday festive. If anything is broken, repair or replace. Your signature moves come into play here, making it easier to shop for fewer things. Remember your calendar? That's where to start figuring out what you need for different events.

Food and drink account for a good deal of holiday purchasing and easy to stock up on in advance. If you entertain frequently, develop a no fail roster of favorite dishes and figure out what non-perishable items you need or use the most. Don't forget staples, such as flour, sugar and butter, which can be frozen. Buy champagne or wine in cases and put them away so you aren't lugging bottles home with each trip to the store. Avoid last minute shopping dashes and buy candles, wrapping paper and ribbon in bulk. Take advantage of the fact that holiday items now appear in stores much earlier and get most of your shopping out of the way.

Make it Work...and Enjoy.

Hopefully by now you are in the holiday spirit... since like it or not, it's upon us. As for us at Retail Minded? We're feeling festive, and wish you productive Project Holiday planning, a happy and healthy holiday season, and a prosperous New Year!