

December, 2009 Make Your List, Check it Twice: Make December Nice!

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My December newsletter title started out as “Organizing in December: Just Do It” but I really can’t afford to be sued by Nike, Inc. “Just do it” is the key to organizing this time of year, though. Any other time of year, I would mention planning your steps, thinking it all through, taking your time, etc. And that would be great, if you can manage it. But expectations and the To-Do List explode this time of year, so results become imperative, and planning falls off a bit.

I don’t know what this means, but a beloved family member had a nightmare about my To-Do List. Not hers, mine. Hmmmm... what does that mean? Was it a self-fulfilling prophecy that my To-Do list exploded a few days later? More like I very happily goofed off for 10 days with vacation and holidays, and now I need to catch up!

So, as is often the case, I learn every day from my own life and clients, and apply what I hope to teach you to my own life, too. Are you a perfectionist-and-therefore- procrastinator? Don’t be embarrassed, you are in good company including most of my clients and me personally. I realized yesterday that I am so focused on checking things off my list, so wrapped up in the perfectionism, that I am not actually enjoying my Christmas Season, though. So that changes today. I will mix up the To-Do List with the “To-Enjoy or To-Play” List and I will accept that “good enough” is better than “Perfect but Miserable”. And I hope you can do the same. That is my wish for all of you.

Overcome the feeling of overwhelmed-ness, which leads us to fear and inaction. Print this out, if you would like, number the Challenges in order of importance for you (maybe you aren’t having guests this year, or maybe you don’t bake, so you can opt out of those!). Use it as a List to make your December Nicer, and then Just Do It!

Tools:

Here is your new Mantra: “**Make your Choices, Assemble your Supplies, Act**”. **Just Do It!** Decide once, write it down, make your move and act, and be done. Then pat yourself on the back, take a deep breath, and move on to the next area of concern!

Ask yourself **what is really stopping you from finishing a task?** What is the sticking point?

Stick with your routines. Now more than ever, it is imperative that you take care of the every day stuff in a quick and competent manner. It is also imperative to maintain your health, so remember those vitamins, exercise, adequate rest, etc.

Break big tasks into little tiny pieces. The thought of cleaning my house may seem overwhelming, but spending 20 minutes on each bedroom today makes things much more manageable.

Maintain Perspective. When we look at everything together, it can seem overwhelming. A leaky pipe is normally not a crisis, but when things are stressful, it suddenly becomes a huge deal, a piece of a global conspiracy to ruin your day.

Realize **Any progress is still progress.** Set a timer today for one hour. Get through as much of the list as possible. When the timer goes off, determine if you can continue on the task (set timer for another hour) or if you need to move on to something else. Return to the list tomorrow at the spot you left off, and set your timer again for another session.

Common Challenges:

Gift purchases: Set your timer, just do it!

Have you started? Are you lost in the middle?

Decide what you are buying for folks, buy the items, wrap them and send them. Stop dawdling, just do it!

Make your shopping list as specific as possible. Decision making is the hardest, most time consuming part of organizing.

Once you make a decision, write it down. For example, if you know you are getting your son a White Sox Jersey, don’t write down on your To Do List “Gift – Daniel”. Write down “Daniel – Sox Jersey, size M”. This enables others to help you, reminds you what you are looking for when you get to the store, etc.

Carve out the time to make your purchases. The internet is a wonderful thing this time of year. I love seeing Jim the UPS guy walking up my walk! If you need to physically go out and shop, determine when your stores are open and carve out the time to do your shopping.

Wrapping gifts. Requires gifts are purchased, so this comes after “Shopping”. Set your timer, then....

Set up your wrapping area (folding card table, guest room bed, who knows?!)

Assemble your tools: Wrap or gift bags, tissue paper, tape, ribbons, scissors, tags and a pen.

Go buy tools, if you need to.

Wrap. Just do it! And do it again tomorrow and the next day, until you’re done.

I tend to wrap my gifts long before Christmas. It gives me a chance to make sure I have all the gifts I need, add batteries or

accessories, and leaves me time to pick up something else if I need to.

Baking: Set your timer, just do it!

Choose your recipes. Stop looking for new ones, focus on the ones you already have.

Collect or purchase ingredients.

Get baking. Just do it! Luckily, we can bake and do other things, too, between batches. I will do a type of cookies every night this week when I am cooking dinner, since I am in the kitchen anyway. And at the end of the week, I'll be done.

(Remember, too, cookies can be bought!)

Cleaning the house: Set the timer, and just do it!

Priority for this is determined by when you are having folks visit your home!

Realize that there are things that can be done right now today to help things go more smoothly later.

Your plan of attack is to work through the most important rooms (public spaces, kitchen, guest room) during your timer sessions until you are caught up.

Buy your cleaning supplies, minor repair items like light bulbs and such.

Get rid of clutter already destined to leave your home (donations, recycling, etc.).

Set up your guest space right down to a final 10 minute dust/sweep/clean sheets and towels session.

You've made your decisions, and assembled your supplies, now set the timer and get busy!

Christmas Cards:

Decisions: My sticking point is that I can't get my holiday photo cards out until I have them printed, and can't get them printed until I either 1) take a new picture or 2) use a picture from our summer vacation. So for me, to solve this issue is not an action, but a decision, and then an action. I need to review my vacation photo and / or pick up my camera.

And no matter what type of card you send, we all need to know how many cards we need, so make your list of recipients to get started.

Supplies: If you don't do a photo card and therefore do not have to wait, make your list of recipients and go out and buy your cards. Just do it! I can make sure I have stamps, addresses and mailing labels, etc., now, while I wait for my cards to get printed.

Act: Once everything is assembled, set your timer or perhaps a number, i.e., 20 cards a day, and work on them until they are done. Pat yourself on the back, take a deep breath, and yep – move on to the next area...

Decorating:

I worked with a client recently who reported dreading the decorating process. She enjoyed it, mostly, but the idea of her 20 bins of Christmas stuff scattered all over her basement and living room seemed too daunting.

I advised her to open one bin at a time, take out only the items she wanted and place it in her home, and then put the bin away.

One bin at a time. Control the flow of chaos.

Decisions: I came home, and realized I could do that, too. I thought I would try a theme this year, so...

Supplies: I have been shopping in my own Christmas bins, selecting only the items I want, the ones that fit my "theme", and putting the rest away.

Action: the house looks nice, I am enjoying my minimalist attitude and my kids will be ecstatic when we put up our Christmas Tree this week. It's all good!

After the holidays, I will re-assess what I did not put out this year and decide if I want to get rid of it.

Entertaining:

Decision: I have a party coming up next week. I have the time to shop and prepare items right now. But I have not decided on the menu. So, today, I will determine my menu (apps and a light meal, by the way).

Supplies: Once I know my menu, I can look at what I have on hand, and then determine my shopping list. And I can answer "Yes!" to people who have offered to bring things, and add those things to my menu, too.

Then I can get cracking on my party planning. And I love party planning!

Have a blessed Christmas Season, and remember to appreciate the joy in the midst of your racing around!