

Deck the Halls without Climbing the Walls

by Michelle LaBrosse, PMP®, Chief Cheetah and Founder, Cheetah Learning

If you're like many people, the holidays tend to bring much more than "Fa la la la la." There's more to do in a short period of time – both at work and at home, and as your To-Do list grows, so does your stress level. There's good news! If you think about your skills as a Project Manager, you actually have a secret stress weapon in your own personal productivity holster. Project Management has the power to transform chaos into calm. Here are 10 ways to make the holiday season more joyful and less stressful.

1. **Gather 'Round the Table.** Have a family meeting and agree on ground rules for the holiday season. If your family is scattered around the globe, schedule a conference call and use e-mail to keep each other updated. Setting some ground rules prevents all the last-minute guessing about dinner planning, who's going where and gift giving.
2. **Create a Yule Tool.** Once you have a sense of your commitments, create a project plan for the holiday. Call it whatever you like and assign clear roles and responsibilities to family and friends and set deadlines. In my experience, at first, you may have a few people who will roll their eyes, but once they are assigned a responsibility and realize they don't have to do everything, then they begin to get into the spirit of it.
3. **Avoid the Budget Blues.** Every year in January, there's always a slew of articles about how much people went in debt during the season. As every good project manager knows, this can be prevented with a budget. Develop an overall family budget based on your project plan and build in some incentives for sticking to it.
4. **Communicate More. Worry Less.** With more activity at the end of the year, your normal mode of communication may not be enough. If you have a large extended family, maybe you need to set up a virtual work group using Google's wiki or Yahoo groups. Then you can have a central place to post communication and updates to family and friends.
5. **Prioritize What's Most Important.** If shipping gifts to relatives who live far away is more important than mailing hundreds of cards, put technology to work for you. Use e-mail and send out an e-card to family and friends. Schedule pick up of packages using UPS or FedEx online.
6. **Build New Traditions.** If gift giving has become excessive or "over the top," it may be time for some new rules. One year some friends of mine spent Thanksgiving volunteering at a homeless shelter. It gave them all a new tradition that left them with a sense of gratitude as a family.

7. **Wrap a Different Kind of Gift.** Just like team spirit at work, family spirit also can be about giving back to the community. Making a donation to your favorite charity is a gift that lasts much longer than tearing paper off a package.
8. **Reflect on the Best of the Best.** Best practices are not just for business. If you think back to one of your best holidays ever, what made it so great? Did you go to Hawaii? Was it a quiet one in front of the fireplace with family and friends and board games? Whatever it was, capture what was good about it, and bring those elements back into this season.
9. **Respect All Cultures and Traditions.** However you celebrate the holidays, remember that your neighbor and colleagues may celebrate the season very differently. Be respectful of others, and your understanding of cultural differences will enrich your own experiences.
10. **Take the Pause.** On a project team at work, we should pause and make time to celebrate our successes and recognize each other. At home, you also need to leave time to enjoy the moment. Don't fill the calendar with so much that there is no time to reflect upon whatever the holiday season or the New Year may mean to you.

As you celebrate the close of 2007 and look ahead to 2008, take ownership of your Project Management skills and use them to make your personal and professional life the best ever. Cheers!

About the Know How Network and Cheetah Learning

The Know How Network is a monthly column written by Michelle LaBrosse, the founder and Chief Cheetah of Cheetah Learning. Distributed to hundreds of newsletters and media outlets around the world, the Know How Network brings the promise, purpose and passion of Project Management to people everywhere. Visit www.cheetahlearning.com to learn more about Cheetah PM, the fastest way to learn about Project Management and get your PMP. You can also get your career in gear with [CheetahWare](#), free Project Management tools from Cheetah Learning.

About the Author



Michelle LaBrosse is the founder and Chief Cheetah of [Cheetah Learning](#). An international expert on accelerated learning and Project Management, she has grown Cheetah Learning into the market leader for Project Management training and professional development. In 2006, The Project Management Institute, www.pmi.org, selected Michelle as one of the 25 Most Influential Women in Project Management in the World, and only one of two women selected from the training and education industry. Michelle is a graduate of the Harvard Business School's Owner & President Management program for entrepreneurs, and is the author of Cheetah Project Management and Cheetah Negotiations.

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