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## Get Organized for the Holidays

If holidays are more stressful than joyful, your schedule could be at the root of the problem. Vicki Norris, professional organizer, says a peaceful season begins by focusing on your calendar. Start this season off right with these five guidelines.

- **Decide what is most important to you.** Ask yourself: What would I be sorry if I missed?
- **Differentiate between obligations and choices.** “If you have been dragging yourself to the company party for years, vainly attempting to illuminate the neighborhood with your twinkle lights (in the rain) or dreading hosting one more expensive gathering, let yourself off the hook,” Norris says.

Schedule the events and family traditions that are important to you. This is when you get out your calendar. Set priorities for invitations, and schedule the most important ones first. “Eliminate any that you cannot reasonably fit in without overload,” she says. Be courteous and send in RSVPs early.

- **Schedule preparation time.** This is the step that often gets nixed, but it is one of the most important. If you have baking or cooking to do, schedule menu preparation and shopping. Schedule time to clean, decorate, mail Christmas cards and wrap. “Make holiday preparations richer by including friends.” Bring friends together for a “wrap party” or a “card party.” Go ahead and schedule post-holiday chores. Plan a day to return gifts and to take down and recycle the tree.

- **Simplify gift-giving.** Start by setting a budget. “This is the ideal time not to try to keep up with the Joneses.” Buy gift cards, and “give an experience rather than more stuff.” Make holidays richer by donating to others. Consider enlisting family and friends for a day of volunteering.