

Question: The holidays are such a busy time. How can I stay on top of everything and still have time for fun?

The holidays, I think, are a bit like wild horses. Let go of the reins and they run amok, dragging you along for the ride, leaving you elbow deep in debt and ten pounds heavier. Corral them, however, and you will canter your way through a season rich with tradition, bright with color, and chock full of memories.

I have just one organizing tip for reigning in the holidays: PLAN – plan the season, plan your time, and plan your budget.

Plan the Season: You know what you *need* to do - purchase gifts, send cards, decorate the house, bake cookies - but what do you *want* to do? Take the leads this holiday season and plan to celebrate! Make a list of all the activities that bring you joy, and then list the additional tasks that are simply necessary. Be as specific as possible. If your lists are shockingly long, feel free to do some trimming before you move on to the next step. Remember: you're in the saddle. There is no law that says you must hang 20,000 twinkle lights *every* year.

Plan your Time: Now take your lists and plug each task into your calendar. Take advantage of the whole month; you'll need it. Write cards while your kids do homework; make a batch of cookie dough as you're preparing dinner; pick up a few gifts on your lunch hour. Balance the things you want to do with the things you have to do. If your calendar runs out of space before you run out of tasks, forgo the unpleasant ones! Opt out of the family fruitcake exchange if it doesn't bring you joy.

Plan your budget: If your credit cards threaten to burst into flames by late December, then you would benefit from a holiday budget. Go back to your list of tasks (the one's you haven't eliminated) and apply a dollar value to each one. Whether you're trying to show a little restraint, or preventing a mountain of debt, a holiday budget will let you know whether you can give your daughter the real live pony she wants or just a hobby horse.

The holiday season is at hand. We can race through it like a thoroughbred or trot along and enjoy the scenery. Either way, we deserve to make time for meaningful traditions and celebrations. One hour of planning and you could have the holiday season of your dreams. This year give yourself the gift of planning – and save some time for a ride in a one horse open sleigh.

Danielle Liu is the owner of Totally Orderly, a West Linn based professional organizing company. She is the President of the National Association of Professional Organizers Oregon Chapter. For more holiday tips and helpful checklists, go to www.totallyorderly.com. She can be reached at Danielle@totallyorderly.com or 503.750.7111.