

6 Tips to Stay Productive During the Holidays

By Lisa Evans; Decemer 12, 2014

Don't let the busy holiday season wreak havoc with work. Don't be afraid to decline a networking event, or shop on a personal day.

Between office festivities and get-togethers with family and friends—not to mention holiday travel plans and the financial crunch that often occurs around this time of year—plenty of things may distract you from work during the holidays.

1. Be Intentional: Staying focused in the midst of the hectic holiday season can seem a daunting task, which is why Kogon recommends implementing the 30-10 promise. "Before the week starts, find 30 minutes to think about the things that need to get done in the coming week and prioritize that list," she says.

Schedule the most important items in your calendar, allowing the smaller tasks to fill in around them. Then, at the end of each workday, reconcile your calendar. "If something didn't get done, move it to another place; reschedule it," says Kogon. Having a plan means you'll be less likely to fall off track by seasonal distractions.

2. Take a Break: The holiday season is a great time of year to take a break. "Research shows that taking even a 10-minute break during the day increases productivity," says Kogon. Take advantage of the seasonal slowdown to give your brain a much needed rest. You'll return to work more energized and ready to be productive in the new year.

3. Take a Personal Day for Errands: Between get-togethers with family and friends and holiday shopping, you no doubt find your personal calendar encroaching on your work life during the holiday season. Rather than trying to cram personal errands into your workday, schedule a personal day to focus solely on those domestic and personal holiday preparations. This will allow you to focus 100% of your energy on work while you're there.

4. Don't Be Afraid to Say No: Is your holiday calendar jam-packed with invites to festive networking events? While you may be tempted to attend them all, Kogon says this can cause unnecessary stress and hinder your productivity.

The key to managing holiday invites is being intentional. Clarify what's most important for you at the moment. For every invitation you receive, ask whether that event is going to help you to achieve that goal. Accepting an invitation because you don't want to hurt someone's feelings can have you burning the candle at both ends and falling behind in meeting your goals.

5. Avoid Procrastination: During the rest of the year, you may find you get an adrenaline rush from pushing deadlines, but Kogon says maintaining this mindset during the holiday season is dangerous. There's a good reason many of us perform at our best while under pressure.

"Procrastinating gives us a rush of dopamine—the body's feel-good chemical," says Kogon. But during the holiday season, too many distractions and crises may come up, causing your stress levels to be elevated to an unnaturally high level. This can make the holiday season truly unbearable.

6. Set Expectations: Be realistic with yourself and others about how much you will be able to do, when you will be available, and when others can anticipate a response from you.

If you normally respond to emails promptly but are facing a particularly taxing day, you may want to set up an email notice to alert others that you may take a little while longer than normal to respond. This not only helps others know what to expect of you, but helps to ease your anxiety over a cluttered inbox.

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