

Santa! “Get a Head Start on the Holidays”

By “National Santa” Tim Connaghan

Every year I hear Santa, and sometimes Mrs. Claus, saying “Next year, I’m not going to wait until the last minute. I’m going to plan ahead and get an early start in preparing for the Holidays.”

We get so busy with our regular day-to-day activities and responsibilities, that when the holiday season arrives, there is just not enough time to add the additional tasks that the Holidays bring. And this is especially true with Santa.

If Santa does not have the lights up and the house decorated by Thanksgiving, he never will!

It can be embarrassing. Because if you don’t, some folks might be thinking, “If Santa can deliver millions of presents all over the world on one night, why can’t he get his house decorated on time?”

So, I created a schedule, or checklist, that you can use to help pre-plan for the Christmas season. It starts mid-year and is based on Santa and Mrs. Claus starting their Holiday work after Thanksgiving.

If you are going to be working at a Mall or shopping center, you may want to move the timeline up a bit as you will be going to work much sooner.

Well, now is the time to get that jump start and to help you get off to a great start.

Most folks may not want to think of Christmas, Chanukah

or Kwanza right now, but many people are. They’re the ones that have truly learned how to enjoy the holidays.

You’ve seen them. They’re the families whose homes are all decorated. They never seem worried or stress out.

They’ve done all their Holiday Shopping. And, they attend every party or social event they are invited to. These are the families that seem to get the most out of the holiday season.

But how did they do it? How did they reduce the stress? How were they able to do all their shopping, attend every event and do everything they wanted to do?

Very simply, they learned “How to get a head start on the holidays!”

Well, now is the time to get that jump start. And, this is very true if you’re Santa Claus!

I know. Because I have spent the past 49 years wearing the famous red suit. And over the years ‘this’ Santa has truly experienced the stress of a busy holiday season.

I am probably like you, getting so busy, with visits, appearances and seeing thousands of children, that we have too little time to spend with our families and to enjoy holiday activities with friends.

From all this I have learned two important things:

You need to un-clutter and simplify your schedule. Realize that you can’t always do everything.

It means prioritizing your commitments, simplifying your outlook and sometimes, living within your means.

Most importantly, you need to do what you and your family enjoy most, and not what others expect of you.

Second, you need to be more organized and plan ahead. It means a better management of your time and what you want to accomplish.

It may also mean delegating some of the work and tasks to other family members and having everyone involved your Holiday plans.

Time Management is really what I am talking about. It saved me, and it can save you.

With the help of some ‘Efficiency Elves,’ I created a simple schedule that helped Mrs. Claus and I do a better job of preparing for the Holidays.

This resulted in less stress for both of us and more time to enjoy our friends and family.

With a little advanced planning, spread out between now and Christmas, you too can reduce stress and have more time to enjoy the holiday season.

If you start now, you can spread out the tasks over the months ahead. By doing a little

each month, you will reduce your December work load. When the Holidays arrive, you will have the satisfaction of being totally prepared and ready to truly enjoy the Celebrations and Festivities.

The first thing you need to do is make a list of every task or activity you feel you need to do, or want to accomplish, during the holiday season.

Secondly, using a calendar and a pencil, block out all the mandatory daily and weekly activities, and add the holiday tasks and events that are on your list. This will take a little work and may require some adjustments or changes. Now you have a rough draft of your

planning and event schedule.

Over the years, I have refined our family schedule and tasks. It has been expanded to start a few months before the holiday season and includes scheduling family and personal activities.

To assist you, I created a schedule with a wide collection of tasks and projects.

From this version, you can add or subtract to start building your own schedule. You may want to compress the schedule to three months. Or, you may want to move some things around. If you think of something else, slip it into the schedule. If something doesn't apply to your situation, delete it. The schedule is a simple

tool you can adjust to your needs.

When possible, I suggest you get other family members involved in the tasks and planning.

With more help and everyone's involvement you should have less stress, everyone will know what is going on and you have the benefit of more family unity and fun.

For your convenience, I have created the schedule in three versions, starting in July, August or September, depending on which month you choose to start planning. You can find them at <http://www.getaheadstart.info>.



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JUNE

- If you are a Mall Santa, you should already have your contract for the upcoming season.
- If you are a private party Santa, you should have contacted all of last year’s clients and reconfirmed them for this year. (I know that some Santas do this starting in January or February.)
- Have you enough Business Cards. Now is the time to re-stock or order new cards for the year.
- Double Check all your existing Christmas wardrobe. Decide on what you should keep, what to get rid of and what needs repairs or upgrading
- Does your suit need new fur? (I replace my fur every three to five years) Just replacing the fur can make your suit look new again.
- Are all your buttons well fastened? Santa’s buttons are often “one-of-a-kind” and losing one can really cause problems, especially if they are un-replaceable.
- What condition are your boots? Do you need new soles or heels? Now is a good time to add conditioners for the leather and to also waterproof the seams and stitching. Leather can dry out during the summer.
- How is your belt your Buckle? Again, leather can dry out. So, while you are conditioning your boots, why not take care of your belt, too!
- Are you thinking about, or planning to, adding something to your wardrobe? The Summer months are a great time to order that new suit or gown, especially if anything is custom made. It gives you time to do it right. And it gives your tailor or costumer more time to make a quality garment.

JULY:

- Go through your Christmas decorations get rid of those that have grown out of style. But don’t go overboard, Remember, most pre-1950 decorations and toys are now valuable collectables.
- You may want to pull out your old holiday decorations and lights and decide what you want to keep and what you want to get rid of. Have a garage or yard sale to get rid of what you don’t want. (It’s ‘Merge and Purge’ time!)
- Make a list of those decorations that you would like to add this year. Then when you are out and about, you will know what you need to purchase. Many shops have pre-season sales on decorations, candles, lights, etc. And the most popular decorations disappear quickly.
- If you give away items to the children, decide on how much you will need this year and considering ordering now and avoid the rush. (Remember that some manufacturers do not over stock and ordering now will insure that they won’t be out of an item, when you order.)
- If you include an annual letter with your Christmas cards, start writing it now while things that have happened this year are still fresh in your mind. Simply add to or edit the letter each month until it’s time to mail them.

AUGUST

- By now, most Private event Santas should have signed contracts or agreements in hand for this year. Some may also have received early retainers, guaranteeing the booking.
- Update your holiday card mailing list. Decide what kind of and how many cards you'll want this year. Creating this list now, makes it easier to update each month, instead of trying to pull everything together later.
- Decide what kind of and how many cards you'll want this year.
- Setup a Christmas gift idea file. Use a separate page or folder for each person on your list and start clipping catalog pages, pictures from magazines, and Sunday newspaper inserts.
- Hallmark often creates a special Holiday Planning Calendar that they give away to customers. Check to see if you can get one.

SEPTEMBER

- Update your calendar. Include all personal and family activities, school & religious events, business trips, family trips, concerts, socials, annual parties, etc.
- Make sure that every booking you have is posted on your calendar. Also make sure that you have included dressing time, driving time, etc. Remember, even a one hour party can take three to five hours to complete. including dressing, driving to and from, performing, and returning home to undress. If the booking is not yet confirmed, write it in pencil. If they cancel, you can erase the booking and start looking for a new job to fill it.
- Is your Sleigh (vehicle) ready for the season? You don't want to have a breakdown while you are on your way to a party. (I also suggest that you have a "Plan B") Do you have a backup car? Can you rent something. When Santa misses an event, No excuse is good enough.
- Scheduled a day or days to bake cookies, make fudge, wrap presents and deliver gifts.
- Make out a list of the things you would like to do this Holiday Season, i.e.: attend a holiday concert; see a live performance of the 'Nutcracker,' visit a theme park or Holiday Village.
- Decide where you will be spending the holidays and make the necessary arrangements. If it's at home, set up your menu and decoration plans. If it's away, double-check school, work and social schedules that may conflict with your travel plans. Now is also a good time to slip in a few scheduled breaks, especially if your calendar is getting full.
- If you are planning to travel, you should be searching now for travel bargains on airfare, hotels, etc. The longer you wait, the higher the prices will be as the holidays approach. If you are driving to an unknown location or place that is new to you, check the internet or the auto club for maps and directions.
- Start ordering gifts, especially ones that require special touches or that may be going overseas.
- You might want to start buying a few gift cards (\$\$\$) each month. Chose popular department and specialty stores, your friends and family shop at. Gift cards are now a very popular form of giving, as they eliminate awkward situation of giving the wrong gift. Check and make sure the gift cards have no expiration dates. Note: Those receiving gift cards will get a bonus when taking advantage of after Christmas Sales!
- Order your holiday cards if you have them professionally printed. Get your holiday picture taken if you include a family photo with your cards. Note: Many local photo studios have special packages for holiday family Portraits. (Some even have photos with Santa!)
- September is also a great month for everyone to start working on their Holiday Diets. (Santa's are exempt from this!)
- Start Shopping! Especially from catalogues with pre-season sales on decorations, candles, lights, etc.

OCTOBER

- Do a final check on your Wardrobe. Now is the time to make sure that everything is cleaned and ready for your first appearance.
- Set up your dressing area. This is a dedicated area in a closet or space where you get all of your wardrobe together. It should include everything! Suits, boots, belts, hats, gloves, glasses, make-up (Yours! Not your wife's!), handouts, etc. Make a check list.
- Finish ordering your gifts. Complete any catalog or online holiday ordering now before the November rush. Purchase Christmas stamps for the cards, labels for the computer, and holiday pocket cards for cash gifts.
- Early in October, (and sometimes late September) Major stores start displaying new holiday merchandise. This is especially true with Target, Walmart, Sam's Club, Costco and even Home Depot and Lowes. And remember, the most popular items will sell out quickly.
- Purchase Christmas stamps for the cards, labels for the computer, holiday pocket cards for cash gifts. (The U.S. Postal Service always has new holiday stamps. They also have Hanukkah and Kwanzaa postage stamps available.)
 - The U.S. Postal Service will issue two holiday stamp sets for 2017 on consecutive days in the New York City area. A set of four stamps showing illustrations from the 1962 children's picture book The Snowy Day will be issued Oct. 4 in Brooklyn.
 - A different set of four, illustrating familiar Christmas carols will be issued Oct. 5 in New York City, where the American Stamp Dealers Association is holding its New York Fall Postage Stamp Show. Oct. 5-7.
 - In December, the Postal Service will also be releasing special stamps with Christian, Hanukkah and Kwanzaa themes.
 - If you need holiday-type stamps before October, the Postal Service sometimes has "Love" stamps or other lightly themed stamps that might work. In past year's stamps had Teddy Bears and Toy Trucks.
- Either make your holiday labels now, or start addressing envelopes. If you do a dozen or two a week, you'll be done before you know it.
- Complete any catalog or online holiday ordering now before the November rush.
- Start looking for rolls of gift wrap, gift boxes and bags, etc. Also ribbon, tags, tape, etc.
- Decide now, what gifts you would like to receive. Tired of getting something you really didn't want or need? Afraid you won't have an answer when someone asks you what you want? Why not be bold this year. Make a list you can have close at hand. It can be a quick reminder to yourself, or you can give it to those you exchanged gifts with. Have a variety of gifts in different price ranges to fit everyone's wallet. Then when someone asks that dreaded question, you can either suggest a gift, or present them with your wish list.
- Pre-schedule December days for yourself, and days to be with the family. Don't assume you can just squeeze them in. Add a few appointments in December with yourself. These are buffer times when you can relax, get a massage, go to the movies, and reduce the stress. Plan for some quality family time, too!
- Make December appointments for beauty salon, barber, spa, golf, etc., before their appointment calendars fill up.
- Re-check school, church or other calendars for events that may conflict with your personal plans. Double-check for events or changes may conflict with your travel plans.
- Get a Flu Shot. If you're a senior or someone who is very active, a flu shot can help you keep your immune system in shape. For Santa, this is especially true as he will see thousands of children during the season, thus increasing his chance of catching a cold or virus.

NOVEMBER

- By now all Santas should have made all their pre-season preparations and checks.
- Make personalized follow-up calls to all bookings. Review the details of the booking with the client. A personalized call is important. Don't assume that a text or email will do. Besides, a personalized call shows the client that you really care. It also helps you as it refreshes the booking in your mind. (I also recommend a follow up call one or two days before your appearance.)
 - Address the rest of your holiday cards before Thanksgiving.
 - Proofread your holiday letter one last time, print and insert into cards or envelopes ready to mail.
- Order any special gift certificates or purchase additional gift cards you may want to give. (Note: It is always good to have a few extra gift cards or gifts on hand for those surprise guest that show up, or for anyone you may have forgotten.)
- Start pre-wrapping those gifts you already have. Starting early on this is one of the most important ways of reducing holiday stress. Make sure you have them well identified. I suggest a little I.D in ink somewhere on the bottom of the gift. In this way, you won't forget what is inside and who you were planning on giving it to.
- Send all your overseas gifts before Thanksgiving.
- Start sending all your U.S. gifts immediately after Thanksgiving.
- Review your calendar for personal parties and events & any changes. You may also want to look for conflicts. And remember that the day after a party or event, you may be a bit tired. So, try not to book too many events that are back to back
 - Shop for any food staples or kitchen supplies you need before November 15th. (Christmas is a tasty time, filled with all kinds of great food. Instead of trying to make it all, get out your recipes now and decide on your favorites. Do an inventory of the ingredients in your cupboards and stock up on what you need, when you catch a good sale.)
 - Time to get your holiday decorations ready. Decide what you are going to use and where you will be putting these and the new items you bought in September.
 - Double check all your appointments for haircuts, beauty salon, etc., now through mid-December. Don't forget your pets grooming too! If you want to do something special, schedule a house cleaning company or maid service to clean you home before Thanksgiving and maybe one day in December.
 - Clean the House. Make this a family day with everyone pitching in.
- Decorate the house. You decide whether to do this before Thanksgiving or after.

DECEMBER

- Final check of your calendar for parties and events & changes.
- Mail your letters and cards on December 1st.
- Enjoy a day of baking or cooking your favorite treats and dishes. Make gift plates or boxes to deliver as gifts, with greetings for friends, relatives and shut-ins.
- Double check your gift lists and finish wrapping all presents before Dec 15th.
- Then, schedule a pre-Christmas massage, a day at the spa or a round of golf, or something special to de-stress, and finally . . . pat yourself on the back for getting ahead this year!

I hope these ideas will help you to reach your holiday goals and give you more time to enjoy your family, friends and the true meanings of the Holidays.

May the Joys of the Season be with you every day.

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