

Take note | Christin Smith Myers

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Years ago a friend showed me her wall calendar and the many papers she had clipped to the November and December pages. After Christmas the previous year, she had taken notes about the gifts she had given, what went well and what didn't, so she had a reminder for the following year. What she gave the mail carrier and newspaper deliverer. What cookies were crowd favorites. How many Christmas cards she purchased. Whether Grandma liked the lottery tickets or said "Next year just give me cash." It was one part diary, one part checklist.

This is a brilliant idea for a variety of holidays and events. Don't trust your brain to remember these things! Spending a few extra minutes as this holiday season wraps up will save you incrementally more time next year because you don't have to start from scratch. It will also save you money.

If you celebrate Christmas or Hanukkah, consider some of these questions:

- What will you do about holiday cards? Send them for first time in a while? Never send them again? Cut down your list? Buy them sooner? Wait for a certain sale? I buy my cards on Zazzle and got a great price on Black Friday. I did have some issues with the website crashing, perhaps due to the extra traffic, so I scheduled a reminder to design the card in earlier November and put it in my cart so I can just buy it when the price drops. I included a note about how many I bought so I don't have to check again.
- Do you have wrapping paper left over from this year you can use next year? Mine is all gone, so I created a reminder for early November to take advantage of Hallmark's BOGO sale.
- Is there anything you wanted to do this holiday season that you didn't get to? I realized we never put up our nativity, which is one of my favorite holiday decorations. So I'm asking my husband to get down the nativity from our garage attic first next year. I'll get a reminder on Black Friday.
- Are there dates you want to remember? My extended family celebrates the Saturday before Christmas, so I already added it to next year's calendar on 12/22. A friend's daughter performs in The Nutcracker and I'd like to consider attending next year; it's always on the same weekend so I added it to my calendar already (with a reminder one month in advance so I remember to buy tickets if we're still interested in attending).
- Is there anything food-related you want to remember? I don't bake but this year I made Oreo truffles that were a big hit at the cookie exchange, so I just put the recipe in my phone and set a reminder so I can make them again. This will also help save money if I remember to buy the ingredients when they're on sale.

- What do you need to remember about gifts? Anyone who surprised you with a gift that you want to make sure you have a gift for next year? (Not that you have to give a gift to everyone who gives a gift to you!) Were there any favorite items you want to buy again? Maybe there's a food item or magazine subscription or event tickets that could be purchased on an annual basis for someone. Did you experience a moment of "Oh, I forgot this happens every year?" If so, write it down! And feel free to email me if you'd like my holiday gift spreadsheet.
- Are there tasks you could easily complete earlier? We typically give gift cards to the teachers, and there's no need to wait until the end of December to buy them. If I buy them a month or two in advance, I don't have to think about them again and I can spread out my spending. I'll put that reminder on in October.

Of course, the strategy of making a note is not just for winter holidays. It can be useful for birthdays, other holidays and celebrations, work projects, events you coordinate, etc.

Make a note. It can save you time, money and frustration, giving you more energy to actually enjoy what you've worked so hard to prepare!