

Feeling the Holiday Stress? Make a Plan for Success

By Michelle LaBrosse, CCPM, PMP®, PMI-ACP, Chief Cheetah and Founder of Cheetah Learning, and Megan Alpine, CCPM, Co-Author

We've reached the last month of 2014 - can you believe it? This time of the year offers many opportunities for getting together with family and friends to celebrate the holidays, but it can also be a very stressful time for many. With the approach of year's end also comes the pressure to meet end-of-the-year goals, coordinate holiday plans, and spend a small fortune buying gifts. Here at Cheetah, we find that it helps to see all of life's to-dos as a series of projects. To-dos confront you as a never-ending, overwhelming list. Projects, however, require you to make a plan.

To reduce your stress and increase your success with meeting your goals for this month, we encourage you to take these simple steps for developing a "holiday project plan:"

1. **Prioritize.** Step back for a minute and ask yourself: what are the top 3 things (such as spending time with family, negotiating for a raise at work, getting your holiday shopping done early) you want to accomplish this month? Establishing what matters most to you is a crucial first step in creating a plan for how to allocate your time to each "project."
2. **Make a mini-project plan.** You don't need to get too fancy with this, but it's also important that you don't blow off this step. After you decide which projects you want to take on, identify these basic elements before jumping into action:
 - What is your project timeline? If the project does not already have major deadlines established, set some for yourself.
 - Who is impacted by this project (aka, who are the project stakeholders)? This includes EVERYONE affected by the project - those whom it benefits, any people you'll need to help you with the project, and those people close to you who may be impacted by this project.
 - What are the project requirements and scope? Following the early-gift-buying project example, this would mean that you need to make a list of each person you'll be buying a gift for and what that gift is.
 - Are there any project constraints? For example - what is your holiday shopping budget? After you identify who you're buying gifts for and what you want to buy, you'll better be able to determine how much you can afford to spend on each gift to stay within your budget.
3. **Timebox.** This is a great little tool that comes from agile methodology, but can be applied to just about any type of project. In timeboxing, you decide ahead of time - you could even put this in your mini-project plan - to dedicate a short, fixed

amount of time to focusing on just ONE project. For example, you decide that this Friday, you will spend from 6 to 6:30 p.m. identifying all the family and friends you need to buy presents for - and during that time, this is all you will do. That's it! This may sound simple, but we've found that this method produces great results.

4. Celebrate! Life is a series of projects - but it should also be a series of celebrations that recognize the amazing things you've accomplished through your projects. After completing each small goal this month, take a moment to feel pride in your accomplishment and show your appreciation for those who helped you reach this goal. When you take a step back to breathe, you not only develop confidence in your ability to reach your goals, but you also get a better sense of the "big picture" of your holiday plan and can re-assess your project priorities, if necessary.

Following these steps is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to increasing your success with your projects. The best way to master these skills is by becoming a Cheetah Certified Project Manager (CCPM). In this program, students master a process for aligning their project activities with their innate strengths based on their personalities and, as a result, learn faster, get their work done more efficiently, and develop strong negotiating skills that allow them to communicate and collaborate better with all project stakeholders. Having success with your projects is not just about following a Project Management formula - it's about developing your own unique skills in a way that allows you to reach your highest potential.

Here at Cheetah, we're committed to helping our students become the best they can be. This month, we're reaching out to a group that faces especially great challenges when it comes to balancing all the priorities and obligations that the holiday season presents: single parents. Our CEO, Michelle LaBrosse (herself a single mom for the past 20 years) knows first-hand how tough things can be this time of year for single mothers. She has started a scholarship fund especially for single parents to become CCPMs. Single parents may be feeling the stress of the holiday season more than most, which is why it's so important for them to master Project Management skills. "Single parents master techniques in the Cheetah Certified Project Management course to get better results, faster, with less effort," LaBrosse said. "Granted, while getting better results faster and with less effort is something worthwhile for most people to do, for single parents it's a survival imperative - they juggle all the demands of caring for their families by themselves." Learn more about the single parent scholarship program or apply for a scholarship at www.cheetahcertifiedpm.com.

About the Author:



Michelle LaBrosse, PMP, is an entrepreneurial powerhouse with a penchant for making success easy, fun, and fast. She is the founder of [Cheetah Learning](#), the author of the Cheetah Success Series, and a prolific [blogger](#) whose mission is to bring Project Management to the masses.

Cheetah Learning is a virtual company with 100 employees, contractors, and licensees worldwide. To date, more than 50,000 people have become “Cheetahs” using Cheetah Learning’s innovative Project Management and accelerated learning techniques.

Honored by the Project Management Institute (PMI®), Cheetah Learning was named Professional Development Provider of the Year at the 2008 PMI® Global Congress. A dynamic keynote speaker and industry thought leader, Michelle is recognized by PMI as one of the 25 Most Influential Women in Project Management in the world.

Michelle’s articles have appeared in more than 100 publications and websites around the world. Her monthly column, the [Know How Network](#), is carried by over 400 publications.

She is a graduate of the Harvard Business School’s Owner/President Management (OPM) program and holds engineering degrees from Syracuse University and the University of Dayton.