

DECIDE UPON YOUR TRUE DREAMS AND GOALS

Cut Holiday Season Stress

2 Wise men and women know the key to achieving balance in the Christmas and holiday season: Decide what you want and plan.

Starters:

■ **Get it done.** If you have designs on taking time off, pick out the most critical items on your task list and cross them off a few days before you go on vacation.

“When you plan ahead, it makes the time you are spending with your family more enjoyable,” investor Arthur Wylie told IBD.

Wylie, author of “Only the Crazy and Fearless Win Big!,” also has an itinerary for the week he gets back to work. This keeps him from losing momentum, he says.

■ **Plan visits.** The bigger your family, the more specifically you need to nail down get-togethers, Wylie advises. Agree ahead of time when — and for how long — you will mingle to cut anxiety and confusion.

■ **Ink family dreams.** Visualize with loved ones. Would you like to run a 5K together? Build a deck? “Develop a to-do list action plan for each month to achieve those goals,” Wylie said.

■ **Start a tradition.** Settle on something you can do to make these weeks more memorable. It doesn't need to be pricey or complicated. Wylie, a single dad, holds an annual holiday movie marathon with his son.

■ **Cap it.** Before you get swept into on-the-spot — and possibly unwise — purchases, map out how much you will spend on each individual on your list. Ellen Schack, CEO of Cowabunga Ice Cream, sets aside separate cash envelopes she uses when buying gifts for each of her three children.

“When I make a purchase, I note the amount on the front of the appropriate child's envelope and put the receipt inside of it with the remaining money and any change,” she said. “I always have a running tally of what I am spending, and

when the money is gone, it is gone.”

■ **Get your rest.** Evening parties, errands and working ahead can lead to fatigue, which can ruin even the most wonderful time of the year.

“I plan my sleep,” Wylie said. Sticking to bed times and taking an occasional nap can lead to a refreshing mental shift.

■ **Cover your business.** Architect Scott Spector's New York City architectural firm, Spector Group, is on deadline with such mega-projects as the World Financial Center and the Audi Showroom in Manhattan. Someone has to be on the clock, he says, to keep these works progressing.

At his firm, staffers know in advance they will be working some during the holidays. Schedules are drafted on a job-by-job basis.

“There's a comfort level with our clients,” he said. “They know that someone will be around.”

Firms that go dead between Christmas and New Year's, he adds, might not be in business next year — it's that critical.

“If you're new in this business and you want to sort of get a leg up, you are answering that phone,” he said. “You are accessible. That doesn't mean you have to sit around at your desk.”

■ **Leverage technology.** Mobile phones are helpful in keeping up during this time of year, Spector notes. Just make sure clients know the best way to reach you.

■ **Zero in.** To keep from getting overwhelmed, visualize tasks. That's the advice of Steve Siebold, author of “177 Mental Toughness Secrets of the World Class.”

“Picture a mental filing cabinet with a drawer for each problem you must tackle,” he said. “Go one by one through the drawers and take on each decision one at a time. The key is to not let the emotions of one decision get in the way of the solution to another decision.”

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