



Rules to Live By in December

It's the busiest time of year. Use these tips to stay both productive *and* sane.

By Gail Perry

December is a wildly busy time for many nonprofit folks. Isn't it for you, too? There are get-togethers to plan, gifts to buy, decorating to be done – and money to be raised. We're in the midst of the hectic year-end fundraising season. With things so demanding and stressful, it's hard to keep your head straight.

But there are ways to manage your workload in December. These simple rules will help you do so.

Be realistic about what you can and can't do.

The dream of perfection is nonsense. Do you really have to go all-out in every single area of your life and work?

Why not create a "Must Do" list and a "Would Like to Do" list? You can highlight the things you just gotta get done on the Must Do list. Then, you can let your "would likes"

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happen or not – it won't be the end of the world if you let some of them go.

For example, you might want to call every one of your donors and ask for year-end gifts – but is that realistic? Or, you might want to bake cookies (if you love to cook) for your favorite donors or colleagues – but do you *have* to do that? Your sanity and enjoyment are more important than having every single thing on the list checked off.

Follow these simple strategies for December at work.

Here are the top three things every nonprofit needs to do in December:

1. Go all-out to renew last year's donors.

Consider how much money is out there from your current donors, just waiting to be renewed. Focus your entire board and team on contacting these core supporters. They are your tribe – they believe in you. Don't let them slip away!

Gently reminding them to renew their support is the easiest ask of all. But here's an important caveat: You have to treat them like friends. Don't put them off by sending them a

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lofty, formal appeal letter. Would you send a formal letter to your own friend?

Remember, many of your loyal donors don't realize they're about to lapse. They may think they've renewed their support or they may have simply forgotten. So following up with them is the appropriate thing to do. It's not pushy or intrusive.

Your donors are busy and they need reminders. Schedule plenty of e-mails to be delivered the last week of the year. You need to be in their inboxes several times this month – and especially on New Year's Eve!

For your higher-dollar donors who haven't yet renewed, ask board members to write a personal note as a renewal reminder. Or pull in a volunteer team to make phone calls reminding donors about renewing.

2. Make sure you “touch” your major donors and funders.

Those foundation, corporate, and individual donors could be supplying over half your operating budget. And don't forget about government officials who allocate funding to you. Funding can come in from many different state and local sources as well.

The holidays are a great time to send a gracious greeting or a small gift of food or a plant. Don't make it too fancy. You just want to remind your top donors how much you appreciate them.

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3. Set your donation page to be the main landing page for your website.

Did you know that 6% of all gifts come in during the *last two days* of the year? And most of these come online.

When donors search for you so they can make online gifts, what do they see? Does your home page make them hunt for the link to donate? Or does your actual donation page pop up first?

Just think: Anyone who visits your site at the end of the year is probably there for only one reason: to make a generous gift. So be smart. Take down that complicated home page for the last few weeks of the year. Make your actual donation page pop up first. Don't make people work to make their gifts to you.

Those three things are the top fundraising activities to worry about in December. If you focus here, you should be fine.

Add self-care routines to every single day.

There's a lot of conversation out there about having a happy, healthy nonprofit workplace. Remember the old saying, “If Mama ain't happy, then nobody's happy.” If your energy is down, draggy, and dull, then you're not good for anyone.

It's hard work being a nonprofit leader. If you don't take care of yourself, you certainly can't be a spark to change the world.



Make time for the fun stuff.

Dang it, the holidays are about family, friends, gifts, and fun. You can choose to turn it all into “work.” Or you can decide to move lightly through all the din and hustle, not taking any of it too seriously. Remember it’s your own life; you yourself can choose how you want to experience it. What good is life as a human if you’re not having some fun and happiness?

This season is all about joy and light. Provide warmth and fun for the people in your organization. Make room for the holiday message of hope and cheer in the lives of those you care about at work and in your life – and grab some fun for yourself while you can.

Gail Perry Group inspires nonprofits around the world with cutting-edge fundraising strategies and new tools to make fundraising more successful and more fun. Find smart strategies to help you raise tons of money at gailperrygroup.com.

“Create a “Must Do” list and a “Would Like to Do” list.”

Handle It All Like a Pro

These articles at NonprofitWorld.org will help you manage your workload, focus on the right things, and handle your holiday plans and year-end fundraising smoothly and successfully:

When It Comes to Time Management, It’s All about Energy (Vol. 36, No. 4)

What Are the Three Most Boring Words in Fundraising Appeals? (Vol. 36, No. 2)

Embrace Mindfulness as a Leadership Practice (Vol. 36, No. 2)

The Ben Franklin Program for Focusing on What’s Important (Vol. 29, No. 1)

How to Add an Emotional Hook to Your Fundraising Letters (Vol. 37, No. 1)

Push the Clear Button to Eliminate Stress (Vol. 30, No. 5)

Moments Matter: A Three-Part Strategy to Leverage Your Time (Vol. 40, No. 1)

Think, Dream, and Do (Vol. 28, No. 6)

What’s the Best Way to Recognize a Major Donor? (Vol. 31, No. 2)

E-Mail Mistakes that Could Be Damaging Your Fundraising (Vol. 36, No. 2)

Revitalize Your Thank-You Letter with a Good Story (Vol. 37, No. 2)

Top 10 Things Donors Want from Your Website (Vol. 38, No. 3)

Fundraising Do’s & Don’ts for December

Do contact your top 10 donors from last year, and ask them to renew their gifts. Who knows? Perhaps that’s all it will take to zoom over goal this year-end.

Don’t ignore your major donors. Treat them like the insiders they are. Touch base with them over the holidays. See how they’re doing, drop off a simple gift, and let them know you care about them.

Do remind your major donors about gifts of appreciated stock. Remember, only 1% of the assets in the U.S. are held in cash. The rest is in stocks, real estate, and other forms of investments. There are terrific tax advantages to donors when they make a gift of their highly appreciated stock.

Don’t send a standard appeal to your top donors. Craft very personalized notes to them. Include an ask if it’s appropriate – but make it a very, very customized ask. Make it feel kind and loving – a reflection of how they feel about you and your cause.

Don’t send your donor a boring greeting card – one that’s all about you. For instance, a picture of your staff wearing holiday garb and saying “Happy Holidays” couldn’t be more uninspiring. (Yawn.) Instead, send a card that reflects your mission. For example:

- If you serve children, send a card drawn by a kid your organization has helped.
- If you’re an arts organization, consider sending a card from the ballerinas or the actors.
- A school can send a card from the students.
- A hospital can send a card from the doctors, nurses, and patients.

Make sure your greeting card triggers happy emotions in your donors’ hearts and brings to mind the people your organization is helping.

Don’t send out complex appeals that are hard to read and understand. Make your appeals skimmable, because donors are moving quickly. Your ask needs to be simple, straightforward, and tied to some measure of impact.

Do make it easy for donors to give online. The more boxes you ask donors to fill out, the less likely they are to complete their donations. When you make them hunt for the “donate” tab, you run the risk of frustrating them. When you make last-minute online giving an easy and efficient joy, you inspire people to give now – and again next year.

Don’t shower your donors with data. Too many facts can overwhelm them. Donors give out of emotion – after you make a compelling case of need.

Do stay sane. Find some quiet and joy for yourself this holiday season. 