

LET'S GET MERRY

A Hilarious Guide to
Surviving the Holidays



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Ten Step-by-Step Guide: How to Be "Booked" This Holiday Season

STEP 1: THE PRIORITY AUDIT (Do This FIRST)

Before you say yes to one more cookie exchange, gift swap, ugly sweater party, or "quick little gathering," grab a piece of paper and a strong beverage. It's time for some truth-telling.

Question 1: What do I actually want from this holiday season?

(Not what Martha Stewart wants. Not what your mother-in-law wants. Not what that annoyingly perfect mom from the PTA wants. What do YOU actually want?)

Examples:

- Connect with my immediate family and close friends (without wanting to strangle them by December 26th)
- Not be exhausted during and after the holidays
- Take personal time for me without outside expectations (yes, hiding in the bathroom with your phone counts)
- Read a book or two by the fire (while pretending not to hear the chaos in the next room)
- Quiet moments with my spouse or close friends (where nobody asks you to do anything)
- Enjoy parties instead of hosting them (translation: be the guest who shows up with a bottle of apple cider or wine and leaves without cleaning)
- Have lazy mornings with family (pajamas until noon should be a constitutional right)
- Actually, *like* the people I'm spending time with (wild idea, I know)

Question 2: What am I currently committed to?

(Go ahead. List everything you've already said yes to. We'll wait. This might take a while. You might need more paper. And possibly a therapist.)

Question 3: How many of my current commitments align with what I want?

(Be brutally honest. The answer might be zero. That's totally fine. That's actually why we're here. If you answered, "all of them," you're either lying or you're a unicorn, and unicorns don't need this guide.)

The Goal: You now have a measuring stick—a magic wand, if you will—to measure every new request against YOUR family's core values and priorities, not Aunt Linda's, not your boss's, not that one friend who thinks everyone should attend her 12-hour cookie decorating marathon.

Every new request gets measured against THIS list. If it doesn't match? YOUR RESPONSE is?
"Sorry, I'm booked!"

(Spoiler alert: You're about to be very, very booked.)

STEP 2: THE CAPACITY CALCULATION

Here's the truth bomb that's about to blow your mind: You don't have unlimited capacity. Shocking, I know. You're not Santa. You're not an elf. You're not even one of those creepy Elf on the Shelf things. You're a human with a finite amount of time, energy, and tolerance for small talk.

Calculate your **ACTUAL** available capacity:

Take out your calendar. (Yes, the one that's already giving you anxiety.) Now block off:

- **Work hours** (unfortunately, these are non-negotiable unless you've won the lottery)
- **Sleep** (you need this, I don't care what Pinterest says about that mom who makes gingerbread houses at 2 AM)
- **Basic life requirements** (grocery shopping, kids' activities, trying to remember if you fed the dog, etc.)
- **Recovery time** (you can't go from event to event like some holiday Energizer Bunny. You will crash. It will be ugly.)
- **Basic personal needs** (showering, eating something that isn't a cookie, remembering to put on your oxygen mask before helping others—just like the flight attendant said)

What's left? That tiny sliver of time? That's your **ACTUAL** capacity. Not your wishful thinking capacity. Not your "I'll just power through" capacity. Your **REAL** capacity.

Now look at your current commitments. Do they fit in that sliver area? Do they align with your core values from Step 1?

If not, something has to go. And spoiler alert: It **CANNOT** be sleep or basic hygiene. (Trust me, your family will notice.)

The Goal: You now have a realistic view of what you **can** handle. "I'm booked" isn't a lie—it's math. And math doesn't care about guilt trips.

STEP 3: THE PERMISSION SLIP

Most people can't move forward until they have permission. It's like we're all still waiting for a hall pass from the universe. So here it is—your official permission slip:

Fill this out (yes, with an actual pen on actual paper):

"I, _____ (*insert your name here, not 'Super Mom' or 'Holiday Hero'*),

Give myself permission to:

- Disappoint people who have unreasonable expectations (they'll survive, and so will you)
- Change my mind about commitments I made when I was a people-pleaser (present myself as wiser)
- Buy store-bought items instead of homemade ones (Costco croissants are delicious, and nobody needs to know, repackage them in your own holiday packaging)
- Skip events that drain me (even if they have an open dessert bar)
- Leave parties early (no need to make up a reason, just do it!)
- Say no without a detailed explanation (no, you don't need a doctor's note)
- Prioritize my rest over other people's preferences (revolutionary!)
- Have a different kind of holiday than everyone else (your holiday, your rules)
- Be 'selfish' about protecting my energy (self-care isn't selfish; it's my right)"

Sign it. Date it. Laminate it if you're fancy. Keep it in your purse/wallet.

When guilt creeps in (and oh honey, it will—guilt is like that annoying relative who shows up uninvited), take it out and read it. Out loud if necessary. Multiple times. In the bathroom, if you need privacy.

The Goal: You've given yourself written permission to break the unwritten rules that are making you miserable. This is your get-out-of-jail-free card. Use it liberally.

STEP 4: THE "ALREADY BOOKED" SCRIPTS

You need language that's kind but firm. Think: velvet hammer. Practice these out loud (seriously, say them to your mirror, your cat, your dog, your houseplant—they all accept you unconditionally, which is more than we can say for _____).

TIER 1: The Soft Decline (Training wheels version)

- "That sounds lovely, but I'm keeping things simple this year." (Translation: I'm keeping my sanity this year.)
- "I appreciate you thinking of me, but my schedule is full." (Full of things like Netflix and not having a nervous breakdown.)
- "I'm not able to commit to that, but I hope it goes well!" (Genuinely hope it goes well. From the comfort of my couch.)

TIER 2: The Firm Boundary (You're getting the hang of this)

- "That won't work for me this year. But thank you for thinking of me!" (Won't work = will cause me to lose my mind.)
- "I'm not available for that. Hope you find someone else!" (I'm available for my couch and a good book.)
- "I've already got plans." (Your plans might be staring at the ceiling or organizing your sock drawer, but they don't need to know that. These are IMPORTANT plans.)

TIER 3: The Advanced Practitioner (Look at you go!)

- "No, thank you." (Short. Sweet. Complete sentence.)
- "No, but have a great time!" (Still friendly. Still firm.)
- "I'm booked." (Say nothing else. Smile. Walk away. You're a mystery now.)

TIER 4: The Boss Level (You've arrived)

- "No." (Just... no. That's it. Period. Full stop. Said what I meant and meant what I said. Big smile! But thanks for thinking of me)

For things you already committed to that you need to back out of:

- "I need to change our plan. I've overcommitted myself and I'm not able to [make appetizers/host/attend/perform miracles]. I apologize for any inconvenience." (Notice: one apology, then done. No groveling required. :))

Notice what's NOT in these scripts:

- Long, rambling explanations (they don't need your life story)
- Excessive apologies (you're not apologizing for existing)
- Elaborate justifications (you're not on trial)

- Lies about why you're busy (the truth is simpler: you're protecting your sanity)

The Goal: You have language ready, so you're not caught off-guard and defaulting to "Yes! Of course! I'd LOVE to bake 500 cookies!" (No, you wouldn't.)

STEP 5: THE DECISION FILTER

When someone asks you to do something, STOP, do NOT answer immediately. I don't care if they're standing right in front of you with puppy dog eyes. You are not required to respond just because they asked.

Your new automatic response: "I'm not sure, let me check my holiday calendar/schedule and get back to you."

Then, in the privacy of your own brain (or actual privacy, whichever comes first), run the request through this filter:

Question 1: Does this align with my core values and priorities this holiday season? (Does it bring me joy, **or** does it bring me closer to a breakdown?)

Question 2: Do I have the capacity for this? (Check Step 2. Does math say yes? Because feelings lie, but math doesn't.)

Question 3: Do I WANT to do this, or do I feel OBLIGATED? (There's a big difference between "sounds fun!" and "ugh, I guess I have to...")

Question 4: Will saying yes to this mean saying no to something I would rather do? (Like sleep. Or not being stressed. Or literally anything else.)

Question 5: Is this my circus? Are these my monkeys? (If the answer is no, why are you volunteering to be the ringmaster?)

If the answers aren't a clear, enthusiastic, jump-up-and-down YES, then your answer is "I'M BOOKED."

The 24-Hour Rule: Never say yes immediately. **NEVER.** Even if saying "let me get back to you" feels awkward. Awkward is better than resentful.

This gives you time to run it through the filter without the pressure of someone's expectant face staring you down like you just kicked their puppy.

The Goal: You stop saying yes automatically and start saying yes intentionally (setting healthy boundaries).

STEP 6: THE EXPECTATION RESET

Here's the uncomfortable truth that nobody wants to hear: Some people will be disappointed.

And here's the even more uncomfortable truth: **That's not your emergency.**

You know what your emergency is? Burning out so badly that you spend Christmas Day crying in the pantry. (Don't pretend you haven't thought about it.)

Time to reset expectations with a preemptive strike:

Send a group text/email to the relevant people (family, friends, that WhatsApp group that won't stop pinging):

"Hey, everyone! Quick heads-up: I'm simplifying my holidays this year. I'm focusing on rest and quality time, which means I'm doing less. I might miss some events, bring store-bought food and refreshments, or keep things lower-key more than usual. Just wanted to let you know, so no one's surprised. Wishing you a peaceful holiday celebration!"

(Notice: Not an apology. Not asking for permission. Just stating facts, like a weather report.)

What this does:

- Sets expectations ahead of time (so they can't guilt-trip you later)
- Gives them time to adjust (and find another victim—er, volunteer)
- Shows you're being considerate by communicating early (you're not just ghosting the cookie exchange)
- Establishes that this is YOUR choice, **not something they get to vote on**

Some people will get it. They'll probably be jealous and wish they'd thought of it first. Some won't get it. They'll clutch their pearls and gasp about "the holidays just aren't the same!"

Not. Your. Circus.

The Goal: You control the narrative instead of feeling defensive later when Karen asks why you didn't make your "famous" casserole. (Spoiler: It's not that famous, and Karen can use Google.)

STEP 7: THE GUILT GAME PLAN

Guilt WILL show up. It's like that one relative who invites themselves to everything, uninvited, and unwanted, but somehow still there.

So, let's plan for it. Here's your guilt-fighting script:

When guilt whispers: *"But they'll be disappointed..."*

You respond: "Yes, and they'll survive. Adults handle disappointment. It's literally part of being an adult."

When guilt whispers: *"But you always do this..."*

You respond: "Exactly. Which means I've done it ENOUGH, time to give someone else an opportunity to shine."

When guilt whispers: *"But what will they think?"*

You respond: "They'll think I have good, healthy boundaries. And if they don't? That says more about them than me."

When guilt whispers: *"But you're being selfish..."*

You respond: "No, I'm being self-FULL. Can't pour from an empty cup. And right now, my cup is bone dry and cracked at the bottom."

Create a "guilt emergency contact": Pick a friend who GETS IT. Someone who will remind you why you're doing this. Text them when you're wavering. Their job is to talk you off the ledge of agreeing to host a 40-person dinner party.

Sample text: "I'm about to say yes to something I don't want to do. **TALK ME DOWN.**"

Their response should be something like: "Remember Step 1? Remember your priorities? Now put down the phone and back away from that commitment."

The Goal: You recognize guilt as a manipulative little gremlin that doesn't actually have your best interests at heart. You are never again ambushed by someone else's plans for you and expectations that don't serve you well.

STEP 8: THE REALITY CHECK

Time to test your fears against reality. Because spoiler alert: Most of your fears are based on catastrophic thinking, not facts.

Fear: "If I don't make appetizers, my mom will be upset."

Reality Check: Has she SAID she'll be upset, or are you just assuming? What's the WORST that can happen? She's disappointed for... what, an hour? A day? Will this matter in five years? Will anyone even remember? (Answer: No. No one remembers the appetizers. They barely remember what they ate for lunch yesterday.)

Fear: "If I don't attend, I'll be excluded from future events."

Reality Check: Have YOU ever excluded someone for missing an event? Probably not, because you're not a monster. And if THEY would exclude you for taking care of yourself, are these really your people? Your tribe? Or are they just energy vampires in holiday sweaters?

Fear: "I'll ruin Christmas."

Reality Check: One person's boundaries cannot ruin an entire holiday. Christmas was happening LONG before you agreed to everything, and it'll happen LONG after you decline. You are not the linchpin holding Christmas together. You are not Atlas holding up the world during the holiday. You're just a tired human who needs a break.

Write down your fears. Then write the reality check next to them.

Look at them. Really look. See how dramatic your fears sound when you write them down? "I'll ruin Christmas" sounds like the tagline for a bad Hallmark movie.

The Goal: You see that most of your fears are catastrophizing, not facts. And bonus: In your quest to face your fears, you're also teaching others how THEY can live their best holidays without fear, guilt, and resentment. You're basically a boundary-setting role model now. Own it.

STEP 9: THE REPLACEMENT PLAN

Here's the secret sauce: Don't just say no to draining obligations. Replace them with things you WANT to do. Otherwise, you'll just feel empty and deprived, and that's no fun either.

Instead of: Hosting a party for 30 people (complete with color-coordinated napkins and a Pinterest-worthy dessert table)

Do this: Invite three close friends for coffee and takeout. Paper plates are fine. Joy is the only thing that needs to match.

Instead of: Baking seven dozen cookies for every neighbor, teacher, mail carrier, and person you made eye contact with at Target

Do this: Buy cookies and spend that time reading with your children, or reading alone, and/or staring at the wall, all valid options.

Instead of: Attending 5 holiday parties (and spending 6 hours getting ready, commuting, making small talk, and recovering)

Do this: Attend two or three that you WANT to go to, and spend the other nights cozy at home in your pajamas watching holiday movies with hot cocoa or hot apple cider.

Instead of: Elaborate handmade gifts that require blood, sweat, tears, and a craft store budget that rivals a car payment

Do this: Thoughtful store-bought gifts or experiences. Make it cost-friendly and simple. Gift cards are not impersonal; they're freedom wrapped in plastic.

Make a "YES" list: Write down 5-10 things you WANT to do this holiday season. Things that make you genuinely happy, not things that make you look good on social media.

Protect these like they're million-dollar meetings. Because to you, they are. These are the things that will fill your cup rather than drain it.

The Goal: Your holiday becomes something you DESIGNED, not something that happened TO you like a natural disaster. You're the architect of your own joy now. Congratulations, you're in charge.

STEP 10: THE EVIDENCE JOURNAL

As you practice being "booked," document what happens. You'll be glad you did. It's like journaling, but with more vindication and fewer feelings. You get to watch your progress in real-time and collect evidence that the sky did NOT, in fact, fall.

EXAMPLES:

December 1st: "Told Mom I'm bringing store-bought appetizers. Braced for impact. She said 'Great!' I stood there confused. Expected a lecture about tradition and homemade being better. Didn't happen. Turns out she was relieved, as well. Who knew?"

December 8th: "Skipped the neighborhood progressive dinner. Felt guilty for approximately 20 seconds. Then felt sweet, beautiful relief for the rest of the night. Made hot chocolate. Watched a movie. The world did not end. In fact, the world was GLORIOUS." LOL

December 15th: "Said no to room parent volunteer. I was convinced the entire school would collapse without me. The teacher found someone else within an hour. AN HOUR. My presence was not critical to the holiday party's survival. Ego: bruised. Schedule: relieved."

December 25th: "Had ENERGY to play games with my children/grand-children, my husband, and close family because I wasn't exhausted from overcommitting. We laughed. We talked. I wasn't fantasizing about going to bed at 2 PM. THIS is what I wanted all along. THIS is the goal."

This journal becomes your proof—your evidence that your fears were way bigger than reality. It's your ammunition when guilt tries to recruit you again next year.

(And it will. Guilt has a short memory and eternal optimism.)

The Goal: You build confidence that healthy, intentional boundaries work. They don't ruin your life, they SAVE it.

TIME TO CELEBRATE YOUR PROGRESS! 🎉

(Yes, you can celebrate with store-bought cake. We don't judge here.)

There you go! Your complete humorous guide to being "booked" this holiday season. May your boundaries be firm, your schedule be light, and your holidays be enjoyable!

HAPPY HOLIDAYS! "SORRY I'M BOOKED!"

BONUS STEP: THE CELEBRATION

On January 1st, celebrate what you DID do, not what you didn't:

- ✓ I protected my energy
- ✓ I was present instead of resentful
- ✓ I modeled boundaries for my family, friends, and co-workers
- ✓ I enjoyed moments I would have missed
- ✓ I survived when saying no
- ✓ I didn't start the new year exhausted and in debt
- ✓ I was the author of my own holiday

This is success. Even if Aunt Susie was salty about it.

The Bottom Line

Being "booked" isn't about being too busy. It's about being intentional with your YES.

When you say, "I'm booked," you're really saying:

- I'm booked with my priorities
- I'm booked with my rest
- I'm booked with my joy
- I'm booked with my actual life

And that's not selfish. That's wisdom!

So, this year, when someone asks you to do one more thing, “WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO SAY”?

"Sorry, I'm booked."

YOUR CHALLENGE:

Choose ONE thing you're already committed to doing that doesn't align with your CORE VALUES AND PRIORITIES. THEN Text your "I'm booked" message TODAY. See what happens and let me know what you love most about unplugging from others' expectations of you. Start enjoying your authentic self. You deserve to enjoy the Holiday season as your authentic self—starting right now.

You've got this. HAPPY NEW HOLIDAY TRIDITIONS THAT HONOR YOU AND YOUR AUTHENTICITY! debra@standupcoachingllc.com



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