

"Go with the Flow," the anti-stress gurus tell us, but that presumes that you have some idea of where the flow is going. I've learned that recognition of the inevitable bottlenecks, boulders, and breakwaters up ahead -- and advance planning to help avoid them -- can significantly reduce some of the daily pressures of my job. Every school year has a basic generic rhythm; the names and specific dates may change, but the general routine remains the same. So creating a Master Planner for the upcoming school year is one of my most important stress-preventers.

To create your own **Master Planner**, start with the following:

1. a copy of the school's master calendar of events already scheduled for the school year (usually handed out at the first faculty meeting, or available from the school secretary),
2. a list of administrative deadlines (budgets, reports, etc.) you'll have to meet,
3. your own checklist of major projects/problems to work on this year,
4. last year's record of scheduled library activities and usage (the plan-book or log used to keep track of specific daily classes, lessons, etc.),
5. a notepad for writing down thoughts, concerns, possibilities, etc.,
6. an assortment of erasable pencils or pens in different colors,
7. small post-it notes in different colors, and
8. whatever format you chose to use for your Master Planner.

Note: I've used all of the following with success:

- a month-at-a-glance planner,
- a year-at-a-glance wall calendar,
- my own (computer-generated) looseleaf format.

Pick the format that works best for your working style and space; the only two requirements are that there is a write-in space for each day of the work week, and that you can easily see the flow from month to month.

Now the real work begins:

1. Start by writing in ALL the dates from the school-wide calendar (marking periods, standardized tests, holidays, conferences, special programs, etc.), in one color. Remember to use something erasable, since some of those dates will, inevitably, change.
2. Note the administrative deadlines for yourself in another color. (It's a good idea to find out what your boss's deadlines are, too -- especially if you want to get something about the library into his/her report!)
3. After everything on those two lists has been entered, go back to the beginning, and read through each month carefully, looking for crunch (heavy stress) periods and coasting (no major deadlines or events) possibilities.
4. Go through last year's calendar to see what annual research projects are likely to be repeated, and when. Pencil them in too, and make a note to check with those teachers to see if/when they plan to do them again.
5. Now look at your list of projects to work on, last year's notes to see what did and/or didn't work, and then. . . .take two aspirins or an instant stress-buster (I prefer a very loud 15-second scream) while you start thinking about, making notes for yourself, and planning ahead for:
 - Those annual projects. Do you need to acquire/locate additional materials, prepare resource lists, plan lessons, maybe even suggest changes/improvements to the classroom teacher?
 - Standardized testing dates. How will your regular program be affected? If the library is going to be used as a test site, will you be supervising, or can you use this time to pre-schedule yourself for labor-intensive management responsibilities like cataloging or collection development? (And remember to inform the powers-that-be that you will be using this time for unique professional responsibilities!) You might

Another *BTDT* strategy from

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also want to suggest special read-aloud titles to teachers, or provide mini classroom collections for individualized reading at this time.

- Report card dates. Can you attach long-overdue notices and bills? Garnish grades? Empty lockers? Declare amnesty or special borrowing privileges for exceptional report cards?
- Special assembly programs and local/national/world events. Can you tie your lessons or activities into these topics, so the students will have something to think about for that inevitable question period at the end of the performance?
- Book Fairs. *IF* you get library funds from the profits, you'll probably want to recommend titles for sale, do lots of sale-related booktalking the week before the actual Book Fair, and maybe even present a book-related program for a PTA meeting scheduled during the Book Fair, to help make more sales to parents. (It's good PR, and should give you even more profits to count on.)
- End of year insanity. When will you announce closing/due dates, etc.? Do you have a timeline (and administrative support) for closing out all the library records and activities?

WAIT!!!! DON'T WRITE ANYTHING INTO THE MASTER-PLANNER YET!!!! AND CERTAINLY NOT IN INK!!!!!!

6. First, re-examine all the big jobs and absolute deadlines.
 - Break each of the big jobs into smaller units of work that can be fitted into the coasting periods, and write each unit of work on a separate post-it note.
 - Use the post-it notes to develop a temporary schedule for each project.

This way you can see how ALL the deadlines overlap, and pace yourself as necessary. For example: in my school the library isn't heavily-booked in November because there are so many interruptions for holidays, conferences, et al. But December is always frenetic, with three different grade-level research projects scheduled, plus teachers starting to ahead for possible activities February and March. Ergo: I schedule time in November to get all the resources and lessons ready for the December projects, and also make sure that any new Women's History materials will arrive in time to be processed and available for use in March.

7. Put the Master Planner aside for a few days, until the chaos of back-to-school subsides. By now, at least three of the originally-scheduled events will have been changed or shuffled. Adjust your Planner accordingly, and then re-read the whole "year" again, looking for highs and lows.

8. Transfer events from the post-it notes to the Planner (still in pencil, please), take a deep breath, and plunge into the 'flow.'

Once a month look ahead at the next two months, so that you can start planning ahead for any new/upcoming projects, re-evaluate any accomplishments, and update your working to-do list.

Of course, you know that just when you think you've got it all under control... something unforeseen will crop up to create a new whirlpool of possibilities and problems, but that's what keeps this job from ever getting stagnant!

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