Organizing Your Next Celebration

Back in the day, a "party" meant catering and hiring staff, place cards and worrying about seating charts. Fortunately, the modern shindig is a much more relaxed affair. Invitations are sent via email or passed on verbally, it's entirely acceptable to have your guests contribute to the meal, and no one really concerns themselves with which fork is for salad and which is for desert. But even the most casual party still requires a bit of planning. Instead of a complicated timetable or overwhelming list of "to-do's," Here's a few simple issues to consider -- make sure each of these is taken care of, and you're guaranteed a great party!

The 5 W's And An H

- who will attend? friends, family, co-workers, neighbors?
- where will it be held? at your house, office, or a separate location?
- what will your guests do at the party? eat, drink, play games, listen to live music, swap gifts?
- why are you having this gathering? a holiday, a personal celebration, a work milestone?
- when will you hold the event? middle of the day, at night, on a weekday or weekend?
- how many people should you invite (knowing that 70-80% of invitees will actually attend)

The Menu

- buffet or five-course sit-down meal? full entrees or appetizers, drinks, and desserts?
- catered or potluck? home-cooked or store-bought?
- alcohol or not?
- do you already have the right recipes and a shopping list, or do you need to do a little online research?
- how much prep-work can you do before the party, chopping or cooking or freezing your dishes in advance?
- if you're running short on time, can you just place an order with a local deli or restaurant and have it all delivered?
- if you're low on funds, can you cook an entree and have everyone else bring sides and drinks?

The Supplies

- do you have everything you need for this party on hand?
- plates, glasses, silverware, and linens? cookware and serving pieces?
- tables and plenty of chairs? decorations? music?
- toilet paper and hand towels?
- if not, can you borrow from friends or family?
- does it make more sense financially and environmentally to buy disposable items?
- to buy used pieces at a thrift store? to expand your collection of "good" housewares? or rent?

Entertainment

- is your entertainment to be the central part of your gathering, or just something that happens in the background?
- do you want recorded music? live performers? a karaoke machine?
- dancing? board games? charades? movies? photo displays? arts and crafts? contests?
- do you need separate entertainment for kids and adults?
- what age groups will you be dealing with, where will you set up each activity, and who will you get to supervise the little ones?

Cleaning

- about a week before the event, give your home a good thorough cleaning, but don't go nuts
- do a quick pick-up each day leading up the the party, putting things away and wiping up any new messes
- the day of, give the toilets and sinks a quick once-over, vacuum, and you're ready to go

Staging

- do you need to rearrange your environment to accommodate your guests?
- move tables to create serving stations? set up extra chairs?
- shut off rooms you don't want accessed? hide embarrassing or personal items that you normally keep in the bathroom?
- put away fragile items and valuables that might get broken?
- set up candles or mood lighting? create a home for coats and purses?

Enjoy Yourself

Don't get so caught up in the planning that you forget the purpose of a party, to have fun. Once you've set everything up, stop the fussing, stop the obsessing, and just relax -- you've worked hard, and you deserve to have a good time!