

Planning Ahead: What to Review Now Before Year-End Sneaks Up on You

& churchcpa.com

Belinda Whitfield, Certfied Public Accountant

September 16, 2025



Every year it happens. December rolls around, and suddenly we realize we're buried under receipts, deadlines, and "I wish I had started this earlier" moments. It sneaks up fast—like the holidays, tax season, and that end-of-year performance review you forgot was coming. If you've ever found yourself scrambling in the last two weeks of the year, stressed, overwhelmed, and frustrated, you are not alone. But here's the good news: you don't have to live like that anymore. With just a little bit of planning, you can take back control and end the year strong.

What Happens When You Wait Too Long

Let's be honest. Waiting until the last minute to get organized is stressful. It means late nights trying to gather paperwork. It means missed tax deductions because you didn't have time to double-check. It means walking into your accountant's office with a shoe box full of

receipts, hoping for a miracle. It means carrying the stress of unfinished business into a brand-new year that should be full of fresh possibilities. Nobody wants to start January already behind.

And here's the real kicker—this pain isn't just about paperwork. When you're unprepared, you miss opportunities. You miss chances to save money. You miss the ability to plan your growth. You miss peace of mind. And for many people, that missed peace feels heavier than the missed deductions.

What Procrastination Really Costs You

Think about this: Every late bill, every missing document, every rushed decision costs you more than money—it costs you confidence. You second-guess yourself. You lose trust in your numbers. You feel unprepared for conversations with your board, your boss, or your spouse. That nagging feeling of "I'm behind" doesn't just live in your head. It shows up in your sleep, in your stress, and in your bank account.

When year-end sneaks up on you, you're not just scrambling—you're reacting. And when you're reacting, you're not leading. You're not steering your business, your finances, or your life in the direction you want to go. You're just trying to survive. That's not where you deserve to be.



Here's Your Game Plan: Plan Ahead Now

Here's the truth: You can end the year strong and start the new year with confidence. But it requires planning ahead. Not perfect planning, not complicated planning—just thoughtful, intentional steps. Let's walk through the key areas you need to review **before year-end sneaks up on you**. And I'll give you practical examples so you can see exactly how this applies to your life.

1. Review Your Finances

Start with the basics: your money. Look at your cash flow, your expenses, and your savings. Ask yourself: Where is my money going? Am I overspending in one area? Do I have enough set aside for emergencies?

Example: I worked with a small nonprofit leader who thought her group was "broke" because she never had cash on hand. But when we reviewed her expenses, we discovered she was paying for three different online software tools that did the same thing. By cutting those extras, she freed up \$3,600 a year. That money went straight back into programs that mattered.

Action step: Pull a copy of your bank statement and highlight three categories where you spend the most. Ask yourself if each expense is necessary, or if there's a way to trim it down.

2. Tackle Tax Planning

This is the big one. Don't wait until tax season to think about taxes. Right now, before December 31, you still have time to make smart moves.

- Do you need to make charitable donations to lower your taxable income?
- Can you prepay certain expenses before year-end?
- Do you qualify for deductions, like a home office or mileage?

Example: A church treasurer I worked with saved the ministry thousands by making an extra equipment purchase in December instead of January. That one decision lowered taxable income and improved the ministry's setup for the next year.

Action step: Call your CPA or tax professional now. Don't wait until January. Ask them, "What can I do this month to lower my tax bill?"

3. Check Your Career and Personal Goals

Year-end isn't just about money—it's also about your growth. Where are you in your career? Are you learning new skills? Are you moving toward the role you want? Or are you stuck in the same spot?

Example: One of my clients realized she hadn't completed any professional training in three years. No wonder she felt stuck. She signed up for an online course in January, and by June she had earned a certification that opened doors to a promotion.

Action step: Write down one skill you want to learn in the next year. Find a class, book, or mentor who can help you get there.

4. Don't Forget Your Health and Wellness

All the financial planning in the world won't matter if you're too tired, stressed, or sick to enjoy it. Take a health and wellness check. How are you sleeping? Are you moving your body? Are you managing stress well?

Example: A business owner I know was burning out. She worked 60 hours a week, skipped meals, and ignored exercise. When she finally took a step back and committed to walking 30 minutes a day, her energy skyrocketed. Her business didn't just survive—it grew, because she was finally thinking clearly again.

Action step: Pick one small habit to focus on. Maybe it's drinking more water, getting 7 hours of sleep, or taking a daily walk. Little steps create big change.

5. Set Realistic Goals and Priorities

This is where many people fail—they set goals that are too big, too vague, or too unrealistic. Then they give up by February. The secret is to break big goals into smaller steps and stay flexible.

Example: Instead of saying, "I want to save \$10,000 this year," say, "I will save \$200 each paycheck." Small, specific, and doable.

Action step: Write down your top three priorities for the new year. Then break each into small monthly goals.

6. Create a Timeline and Action Plan

Once you know your goals, you need a plan to reach them. This isn't about making your life rigid—it's about giving yourself a roadmap.

Example: A nonprofit board I advised wanted to raise \$50,000 in grants. Instead of waiting until the last minute, they mapped out deadlines: grant research in January, applications drafted by March, submissions by June. Guess what? They hit their target by October.

Action step: Pull out a calendar. Mark down the deadlines that matter most—taxes, applications, reports, bills. Then add your personal goals to the same calendar. When you see it all in one place, it's easier to follow through.

Practical Tips to Stay Ahead

- Use a checklist for year-end tasks.
- Schedule 30 minutes a week to review your finances.
- Meet with a trusted advisor before December 31.

Celebrate your wins, no matter how small.

FAQs About Year-End Planning

What if I feel like it's too late to catch up?

It's never too late. Even one small step—like organizing your receipts—can make a big difference.

How do I stop procrastinating?

Break your tasks into tiny steps. Instead of "do taxes," try "gather receipts today." Small wins build momentum.

What should I review first?

Start with your money. Look at cash flow, expenses, and taxes. Then move to career and personal goals.

Do I really need to meet with a professional?

Yes! A 30-minute conversation could save you hundreds or thousands. Don't guess with your money.

What if unexpected expenses pop up?

That's life. Build flexibility into your plan. Adjust your goals without giving up on them.

Action Items for You

- 1. Review your bank statement this week. Highlight where your money is going.
- 2. Call your CPA or tax professional before December 31.
- 3. Write down your top three goals for the new year.
- 4. Pick one small wellness habit to start now.
- 5. Mark your calendar with important deadlines.

Final Word

Don't let year-end sneak up on you again. Planning ahead isn't about perfection—it's about progress. When you take these simple steps, you'll not only save money and reduce stress, but you'll also step into the new year with confidence. You deserve to start fresh, ready, and strong. And the best time to get started is right now.

Take Action &

П	

ABOUT US



We empower churches and ministries throughout the country to take charge of their finances. Our job is to "clean house" by helping ministries get their finances organized to prepare for God's increase in their ministry.

With our help, churches know exactly where their finances stand at all times, and keep everything organized so that, when God puts an opportunity in their path, the financials are ready and senior management can move forward with their plans.

Professional Credentials

State of Illinois Public Accounting Firm License # 066.004028

State of Illinois Certified Public Accountant License #065.027863

Member of the Illinois Certified Public Accountants Society

Member of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants

Better Business Bureau Accredited Business

"In my 15 years of ministry, I have never met someone as qualified to handle our church finances as Belinda Whitfield... I cannot recommend her enough. If you're considering using their services, I say do it and you will not regret it. In fact, you will be thankful that you did."

> Joe Wyrostek Metro Praise International Chicago IL

Belinda Whitfield Certified Public Accountant

