

EMPLOYMENT

Job Hunting During The Holidays

Theresa and Cara were walking through the mall a few weeks before Thanksgiving. Christmas carols were playing in the background to get shoppers into an early holiday mood. Theresa turned to Cara dismayed.



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"I have been unemployed and looking for a job for almost a month. Hearing that music reminded me that the holidays are really here, and I will not be able to do any job hunting until after the New Year. It makes me scared and depressed," she said.

Cara turned to her and said, "I wouldn't be so quick to look at this time of the year that way. Remember me last year? I was looking for a job during the holidays and found the season between Thanksgiving and New Years to be a great time for job hunting."

"You've got to be kidding!" Theresa answered back. "It's common knowledge that it is a waste of time trying to conduct a job search between Thanksgiving and New Years."

That's wrong. In fact, the holidays are a great time to look for a job. Here's why:

End-of-the-year openings

Although business does slow down during the holidays, it doesn't come to a complete halt. Amid all of the shopping and partying, there is still serious work going on. Many organizations have openings and, because they do not want to lose their funding for the following year, they look to get those positions filled immediately.

Other companies are gearing up for new initiatives in 2010 so they have to move quickly. Even if all of the jobs aren't filled by the end of the year, the staffing has to be well underway by then. Savvy companies are filling the pipeline now to fill crucial openings.

Decision makers are around more

Decision makers are around more because business travel slows during this

time of the year. Chances are that it will be easier to connect with actual hiring managers, and there is a good chance that they will pick up the phone. Be ready to have your short focused pitch ready each time you make a call. You never know when you might catch that all important person.

Recruiters have more time

Recruiters have more time during the holidays, and they, too, try to keep the pipeline filled. Recruiters are highly motivated to achieve increased commission benchmarks through end-of-the-year placements. Don't be surprised if you get a call from a recruiter during this time. It can be to your advantage to meet with them.

Touching base with your contacts

The holiday season is a great time to reconnect. Touching base with all of your contacts to wish them happy holidays is a great way to let them know that you are still available. Think about people you have met in the past and former co-workers, clients, customers, and vendors. You can send a quick email or a nice card and include an invitation for a quick drink or lunch. People are in a holiday mood and may be more available during this time of the year than they were earlier. Just remember to keep it light. No one wants to be ambushed with a desperate plea.

Always have your business cards

There are unlimited opportunities for networking during the holidays, including community functions, school activities and accidentally bumping into people in the shopping mall. It is a bonanza for schmoozing. Don't carry around stacks of resumes but do have business cards with you at all times. Go to Vistaprint.com and get printed business cards with your name and contact information, including your email, and a two-word descriptor of what you do. For example, you could put medical assistant or production manager and exchange the cards with the people you see.

Party smart

Attend every event to which you are



invited. Don't let depression or embarrassment keep you at home. To make the most of holiday parties as a networking tool, you need to adopt the "you first" approach. After engaging individuals in small talk, ask them more focused questions that show that you are really interested in them. Ask about their careers, hobbies and plans for the New Year. But don't worry that you will not have an opportunity to contribute. People appreciate the interest you take in their lives and they will reciprocate. Others will ask you questions and will even make it a point to remember who you are and ask how they can help you.

Keep your game face on

Fake it if you have to and turn questions around by asking about other peoples' businesses. Make plans for short follow-up meetings. Keep your head up and smile, and don't let your body language contradict what you have to say. Keep your drinking to a minimum. It is never a good idea to have to worry about what you might have said. Always hold your drink in your left hand so that your handshake won't be wet and cold.

Volunteer

One really great technique for making contacts during the holiday is to volunteer. You will provide needed help and make some valuable contacts. There are many groups that can use your help right now. If you have the extra time, put it to good use. You will be surprised at the benefits that come back to you.

"Thanks so much. I just hadn't thought of any of those things, but I can see that you are right" said Theresa. "I can see that if I do these things, when January 4 rolls around, I will feel that my time has been productive and I won't start the year with a terrible feeling in the pit of my stomach!"

Your job search should definitely not take a vacation during the holiday season. While progress might be slow, it is important to keep your strategy in place. Continue to send resumes, keep networking with colleagues and friends within and outside of your industry, and remain positive.

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