

# Report on **Business**

## Use the holiday week to career advantage

While others slack off, the days between Christmas and New Year's can be put to good use for those on the job and on the job hunt

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It's a slack-off week for many in the working world. But for Susan Tate, the days between Christmas and New Year's will be strictly business.

The Dartmouth, N.S.-based job hunter intends to work, even Christmas Day, putting together a video résumé and posting it on social networking sites. Through the week, she'll also be writing blog material on her [job search](#) for a personal website she's setting up, sending out e-mails to networking contacts and pushing to arrange meetings with potential employers.

"I am going to keep myself front and centre, and let them know that I'm eager and want them to keep me in mind," says Ms. Tate, 45, who's looking for a job as a manager in communications or business development. "I expect the holiday week will be the best time to put myself on the radar for hiring in the new year."

She's on the mark, career experts say. Keeping up the job hunt over the holiday week is a terrific tactic in a market that has more people on the prowl for employment than usual, notes Tim Cork, president of job transition consultancy NexCareer in Toronto.

It's not just job hunters who can use the final week of the year to career advantage. For those who are employed, it's a time like no other to reflect, sum up and set a career agenda for the coming year, pros say. It's also a time when managers have less on their plates, so both job hunters and employees may find it easier to get face time.

How to make the most of the week? Whether on the job hunt or on the job, here are ways to score career points:

### **On the job hunt**

Ask for face time

Others may be taking time off but "leaders and hiring managers are definitely going to be in their offices looking ahead to the challenges of the new year," Mr. Cork says.

They will, however, have less busy agendas and fewer immediate time pressures. So they're likely to be more willing to meet, if you just make the request, Mr. Cork says.

Your interest should get you a good hearing, he says, because "people are still in the holiday spirit and develop a mindset of giving, which means they are more willing to help and spend time with those who

ask."

As well, at this time of year, "companies are looking at head counts and budgets, and your timing may be perfect to discuss how you can help them in the recovery," Mr. Cork says.

With offices emptied, you may be surprised to find those you want to meet answering their own calls, he says. Dropping an e-mail may also get you a much faster response.

This may be the one time of year when a cold-call visit to a hiring manager could get results, says Allison Graham, principal of London, Ont.-based Elevate Seminars and Strategic Development Inc. and author of *Business Cards to Business Relationships: How to Build the Ultimate Network*.

Showing up at the office gives you an opportunity to see the environment, meet the receptionist and maybe serendipitously get a few minutes of the manager's time, she suggests. You can also use these tactics to gain face time with other networking contacts.

Whatever you do, keep it all informal because this isn't a traditional time for job interviews, Ms. Graham cautions.

"Don't expect a lot of hiring decisions will happen between now and the end of the year. Your goal is not to land your [new job](#) over the next week. Rather it's to set the foundation, so the person has a positive impression of you so he'll move your résumé to the top of the pile," when decisions are made in January.

Reflect on what you want

Year-end is a traditional time of reflection and you should leaven your active job search with some thinking about the bigger picture of what you're after, suggests leadership coach Lorraine Clemes, president of Life Design Consultants in Toronto.

"Ask yourself: What has, and has not, been working in your search? What advice are you getting from others about trends in your field, or why they can't find a place for you right now?" Send season's greetings

The holiday season also presents a perfect opening to offer greetings to people you haven't recently been in touch with. To all of those helping her in her search, Ms. Tate says she plans "to send out big thank you notes and best wishes for the new year." But she will also use it as an opportunity to ask them to put her in touch with more contacts.

## **ON THE JOB**

Quality time with the boss

Just as job hunters can benefit from [senior executives](#) having less on their plates, so can employees. "Ask the boss to lunch, or just coffee for a chat," Mr. Cork suggests.

Such an encounter will come with "less pressure than in meetings or performance reviews during the rest of the year," he says.

But it shouldn't be idle chit-chat. "You should still go in with an agenda looking ahead," he says. Ask pointed questions about your boss's expectations of you in the coming year.

Let your boss know, too, that you're eager to be helpful for whatever priorities he or she has set.

Questions like "Is there anything on your plate I could take on to help you?" will be appreciated by your boss, Mr. Cork says.

A time when agendas are sparser might also open up opportunity for you to get to know those who are even higher up the corporate ladder, Mr. Cork notes.

They are also important contacts who can really help you advance your career.

#### Demonstrate your breadth

With the office half-full, there may also be opportunities to spread your wings by taking on work that normally isn't in your domain or might not otherwise come your way.

That offers a chance to display and develop skills that might not be obvious in your daily job, make new connections and earn team-player points, Mr. Cork says.

You can also use that as a foundation for further development: It may offer clues about where you can expand your role and give you a chance to show the boss that you have skills and ability to take on a broader set of responsibilities, he says.

#### Create your ideal job

The end of the year is a traditional time of summing up, and there is no time like now to sit down and think about what your ideal job would look like, suggests Karen Kelloway, a leadership development consultant for Knightsbridge Robertson Surette in Halifax.

"People get so wrapped up in what they have to do in their daily work that they lose track of what they would do if they could write their own job description," she says.

So spell it out: "What would your title be, what would you be doing in that role; what results would you be creating; who would you be working with?"

Asking yourself these questions will clarify what you really want in a role "and most importantly what you bring to that role and what skills and experience you will need to grow into that ideal position," Ms. Kelloway says. Review your reviews

The end of the year is also a time to look back on accomplishments, so use the time to review what has and hasn't been working in your career, Ms. Clemes recommends.

"Ask yourself questions like: What advice are you getting from others that might suggest trends and opportunities you should be pursuing? Are you missing a skill you could plan to learn?"

Also take time to pat yourself on the back for accomplishments, recognition and rewards you received, Ms. Clemes adds. It's been a year when it was particularly easy to allow the constant rush of demands and unsettling news to make you lose track of the satisfactions that come from your work. Out with the old

In-boxes get clogged, desks pile up with paper, and file drawers are overflowing. This is a perfect week to clean up and clear up to be more organized and to feel more on top of your job for the year ahead, Ms. Graham says.

