

CareerSmart Advisor™

Strategies & Solutions for Your Career Success

A Note From Dave

Over the last fourteen years, we have asked recruiters for the key characteristics they are sent to “find” when given a search assignment, and the top three traits every single year are always **leadership, industry-specific experience and functional expertise.**



There are literally thousands of people and companies who make their livings trying to understand what leadership is and how to grow it, nurture it, develop it, implant it, copy it, manufacture it, buy it, sell it, etc.

But how do you find something you can't fully define? If you're like me, you know it when you see it; but there are tangible qualities too, such as how well they perform the three critical things they get paid to do — **hire, fire and evaluate.**

At the risk of being overly simplistic, the rest you can learn from books and on-the-job experience. Said differently, leaders are judged by their ability to make judgments (often subjective), which are always open to interpretation and argument.

And who is to say what's right or wrong but they have to make the judgment nonetheless and then be able to take the heat from those who disagree. In short, they must take a stand for a belief.

Not easy stuff. I invite you to contribute your thoughts on leadership to my blog, *Six-Figure Learnings* (www.execunet.com/davesblog).

Sincerely,

Dave

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Why Job Hunting Shouldn't Take a Holiday

By Marji McClure

‘T is the season for job hunting? For many job seekers, the holiday season is typically looked toward with dread, as it usually represents time lost in the job search process. But the best gift job seekers may be able to give themselves this time of year could be a combination of strategy and persistence because recruiters and employers may be more focused on filling positions than candidates think.

Recruiters, human resource professionals and career coaches agree that hiring may slow during the last two months of the year, but it definitely doesn't stop. Opportunities do exist for candidates willing to stay in the game and find them.

Confidence During the Holiday Season

Those Who Are Confident/Very Confident that the Executive Employment Market will Improve in the Fourth Quarter

	2004	2005	2006
Senior Executives	14%	20%	30%
Search Firm Recruiters	67%	64%	71%

Source: ExecuNet

Reduced Competition, Increased Opportunities

Rick Taylor, SPHR, president of Ratliff & Taylor Inc., an executive search firm based in North Olmsted, Ohio, says that the pool of candidates does tend to be a bit smaller during the holiday season because many companies delay downsizings until after the New Year. “But it is a much more assertive group that is seeking new employment,” notes Taylor, also an ExecuNet meeting facilitator in the Cleveland region.

It is a group that can take advantage of positions that can open at a moment's notice. “Even if my internal job opens are low, I have to keep my finger on the pulse of what candidates are available,” says Jill Franzon, human resource manager for Stamford, Conn.-based International Meetings & Science, a medical education and communications company. “Internal situations can change any minute, and it is always best to have a

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handle on the situation.”

If any of these positions are critical to a company’s operations, it’s not out of the question for holiday season job seekers to officially secure a new job before the first of the year. “Most companies with ‘acute need’ positions to fill will seek to get their offers out to the final candidates so they can start work on January 1,” says Mark James, CPC, president of San Diego, Calif.-based Hire Consulting Services LLC and an ExecuNet meeting facilitator.

Overall, the occurrence of a slowdown in hiring depends on the industry, company and overall health of the economy, says Meg Montford, chief coaching officer of Kansas City, Mo.-based Abilities Enhanced. “I’ll never forget one December when I was working as a recruiter many years ago and I had the biggest sales-generating month of the year, actually of my entire four-year tenure as a recruiter,” recalls Montford. “As with all job search activities, there are no absolutes.”

Still Open for Business

While many organizations do slow their hiring during the holiday season, other processes also slow during this time. It also means that the hiring managers who have not left town on vacation may have more time to talk about employment opportunities. It’s possible to get some face time with

Your 2007 Job Search Checklist

While November and December can be productive months in terms of job hunting, it’s still wise to spend the last couple of months of 2006 preparing your strategy for 2007. Mark James, CPC, president of Hire Consulting Services, LLC, offers the following suggestions to create a solid new year strategy.

- Update your résumé and cover letters
- Research 30 to 60 new target companies in your industry
- Contact 20 new recruiters that specialize in your discipline and industry
- Conduct salary research to determine your worth
- Rediscover your competencies, skills and behaviors through comprehensive assessments
- Improve your interviewing and salary negotiation skills
- Consider hiring a professional career coach
- Start a new diet and exercise regimen

these individuals that you may not get during busier times of the year.

“Very few organizations actually close during the holidays and it may be one of the best times to find people available with more willingness to take time for conversations, especially informational interviews,” says Janine Moon, master certified career coach with Columbus, Ohio-based CompassPoint Coaching LLC and an ExecuNet meeting facilitator. “Even if organizations aren’t technically in a hiring mode, most good leaders keep their eyes open for talent regardless of the season, and may, at year-end, be quite open to talking about expectations and new directions for the next year.”

They will especially be more willing to talk if their budgets have been approved and they are confident they will be hiring in the new year, adds Taylor. “Strategic managers may also realize that

turnover is usually high after the holidays, and they may want to build up their database of potential replacements, if needed,” Taylor says. “We tell our outplacement candidates that they should really work hard during the holiday season to, hopefully, get their new job in January or February.”

Franzon agrees that holiday job seekers increase their chances of getting their résumés seen and securing interviews. “For those candidates waiting for a bonus or an evaluation, they can interview in December but request a January start date,” Franzon says. “This way, they get the best of both worlds.”

Moon says one of her favorite holiday stories involves an individual who attended ExecuNet meetings for several months. He abruptly stopped right after the holidays before returning in early spring to reveal the secret to his job hunting success. “It seems that he saw nothing to lose by taking advantage of the traditional ‘down time’ in many organizations over the holidays,” says Moon. “He decided he would go door-to-door, with targets in mind, and ask to see hiring managers or HR directors. He found many people in and had a number of conversations during the holiday ‘down time.’ He got a job offer from one of his visits because of his timing and his initiative. He didn’t know what he might find, but he made the most of the possibilities.”

Networking Holiday-Style

If anything, the holiday season offers more opportunities to network than other times

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A Slight Shift in Company Priorities

Companies often have other priorities, in addition to hiring, at the end of the year. Organizations that end their fiscal year on Dec. 31 are typically concerned about closing their books, and hiring practices can temporarily take a back seat.

“They are focused on closing business and making their numbers at the end of the fiscal year, and there is little one can do to take the focus off business and put it onto hiring,” says Carol Schultz, principal of Select The Best I, LLC, an executive search firm based in Parker, Colo. “Companies are judged by revenue attainment, not the number of hires they can acquire.”

Companies also delay hiring for reasons not unique to the holiday season. In fact, notes Schultz, she has learned that delays in hiring revolve less around the time of year and more around timeless issues, such as the sense of urgency by a client to fill a position.

Candidates’ own motives certainly contribute to a slowdown in the market as well. Since most companies who reward employees with bonuses do so at year’s end, many employees choose to wait for the check before they make a move. Thus, the number of available candidates during the holiday season is reduced.

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of year. Holiday parties can be an ideal setting to make valuable connections in the job search. “Networking is very natural over the holiday season,” says James. “It brings us in contact with people we don’t see very much during the year: former work colleagues, neighbors, relatives and old friends. Sometimes you get a greeting card from someone you lost track of — that’s the perfect time to pick up the phone and reach out to get reconnected.”

Getting reconnected during the holidays will help job seekers if their job search moves into the new year. “These people can all be very influential members of your network, and once you’ve reconnected over a holiday get-together, you can naturally follow-up to ask for more specific job search advice and connectivity assistance,” adds James.

While attending these functions, it’s important to remain positive. A festive attitude will only help you yield the results you wish. “Avoid the ‘bah humbug’ routine,” advises James. “Your transition success outlook and optimism will draw more positive results from the people you meet, and they will naturally try to help and offer advice, leads and referrals. If you are comfortable with your situation, then your audience will be too.”

“It’s also an opportunity for the seeker to focus on what he or she is grateful for and ask others the same,” adds Moon. “This provides a little different context in which to meet and network with others.”

Maintain Your Momentum

It may be difficult to stay focused on job search-related tasks, such as networking, during the holiday months. But it is vital to keep that job search strategy intact during this time. “By keeping up their

Holiday Networking 101

Networking never takes a holiday, and the season is actually the perfect time to connect with the contacts you’ve made over the years.

“It’s a time to create foundations for new relationships for the new year and strengthen [old] relationships,” says Ilise Benun, author of *Stop Pushing Me Around: A Workplace Guide for the Timid, Shy and Less Assertive* and founder of Hoboken, N.J.-based Marketing Mentor.

Benun offers the following tips for successful holiday networking:

- Engage in smart talk. Ask strategic questions that will help you get to know people and know them better. “Ask people how their year was,” says Benun. “Learn what was important to them — what were their goals [personally and professionally]? What are their plans for 2007?”
- Set the foundation for follow-up. “Make sure in your holiday conversations you’re looking for content you can follow-up with,” says Benun. “You need to follow-up with something specific [such as a job opening] in January.”
- Send out holiday cards — but make them unique to you. “They have to stand out and if possible, make them as personal as possible,” says Benun. “It shows you have taken the time, and it shows you care. People respond to that.” Always write a personal note inside. Add a small gift card, if possible. “People don’t throw [gift cards] away, and they remember where they got them.” Benun adds.
- Don’t send e-cards. “It says ‘I’m lazy,’” says Benun. “Something tangible is more effective.”
- Use holiday parties effectively. Don’t drink too much. If you bring a spouse, friend or partner to a party, prepare them with information about who’s who at the event and don’t let them serve as your promoter. “Your partner should not lobby for you.” Lastly, make an effort to approach people you would not have access to otherwise [such as a company CEO].

schedule and even increasing it, job seekers will be ahead of others who look at this time as less value,” says Moon, who adds that it can represent an ideal time to reach out to company decision-makers who may be more accessible during the holiday months. Moon suggests calling these individuals early in the day and late in the afternoon, when they may actually answer their own telephones.

Moon also suggests enlisting the help of an accountability partner during the holidays. “Whether it’s a coach or another job seeker, focusing on the search as a project — one with timelines and objectives and teammates — will keep us more motivated than when we try to go it alone.”

Celebrate Your Progress

If you don’t find many opportunities

within your field during the holiday season, don’t let it diminish your motivation. “Give yourself permission to take a vacation from the job search and its stress,” says Montford. “Holidays provide enough stress anyway without adding the job search angst. Find meaningful and inexpensive ways to celebrate the holidays. Remember that giving presents is so much more about expressing love than material worth.”

Moon concurs. But she says that while job seekers should allow themselves to slow down during the holidays, they must do it judiciously. “Identify the ‘slowdown’ days or afternoons and use them as motivation to stay in action and ‘work the plan’ even when it seems that no one else is working during the holidays,” says Moon. “It is a perfect time for job seekers to identify what they are grateful for in their lives, and to make a list and share it with others. Somehow, sharing gratitude is uplifting and it often helps us shift to the positive — something that always helps in staying or becoming motivated and being at peace during the season.” ■

Expert Resources:

- Jill Franzon, International Meetings & Science (aboutimsci.com)
- Mark James, Hire Consulting Services LLC (hireconsultant.com)
- Meg Montford, Abilities Enhanced, (abilitiesenhanced.com)
- Janine Moon, CompassPoint Coaching LLC (cpcoaching.com)
- Carol Schultz, Select The Best 1, LLC (selectthebest.net)
- Rick Taylor, Ratliff & Taylor (ratliffandtaylor.com)