

How to Keep Your Job Search Going Strong in December

Mary-Frances Fox

People who are between jobs in December may think companies don't do much hiring for full-time positions during the festive season. But don't retreat to the sofa and the party dips too early. "December is prime time for anyone who wants to find a new job before March, because the average job search takes at least three months", says Mary-Frances Fox, President of Work Creatively, a Toronto career development and workplace coaching firm. "The slowdown of business, and the holiday mood make this a great time for job seekers to make an impact on prospective employers".

A Toronto statistician was interviewed by an energy company last December 24, and on January 4 was off to Alberta looking for a new house. An employment officer faxed out letters until 6pm one December 23rd, which resulted in an interview Christmas week and a job starting in January.

"Things happen for job seekers who take a 'business as usual' approach this month. Your time is a valuable asset - invest it in your future. The key for job searching in holiday periods is to set your mind on what you want to happen (not the obstacles you face), and set goals for each day. Picture the date you intend to be re-employed and write out measurable goals, working backwards to right now. Don't wait for motivation to strike; it comes from getting busy.

By working smart during December, then taking a holiday break along with everyone else, job seekers can keep up their confidence, uncover unadvertised job leads, and start January off much faster than their competition", says Fox, a psychotherapist and career management professional. She recommends three informal strategies to make real headway during December:

Ask everybody one valuable question - Update people who know you (friends, relatives, former bosses and coworkers, even retirees) on what you do and the type of company you expect to work for. Rather than asking if they've heard of any openings, ask who they know in your line of work. Call those people this month, with a brief introduction to your expertise and a few prepared questions about where they think the opportunities are in the industry. Talking shop instead job openings gives people a chance to get to know you with no pressure. If an opening exists, they will consider you after this conversation. If you ask for just 10 minutes of their time, most people enjoy responding to reasonable, work-related requests. And with Christmas on a Monday this year, many people will be working the entire previous week. They may welcome a chance to fill out their day by chatting to someone knowledgeable in their own field. Aim to speak to 50 or more people about your work in December, and ask your new contacts if you can stay in touch. A thank you note to anyone who gives you their time or contacts is a memorable gesture, which keeps doors open.

Send a business letter, not a resume - List about 20 companies you'd like to work for, considering your experience and your requirements. Find out more about their products and customers from their website, your reference librarian or by gathering their brochures. Write a letter to the person who would be your boss, by name and title. (You can often request the correct spelling of a department head's name by calling the department and pressing '0'). In the letter, say why you admire the company, and list two or three achievements from your resume that would make a solid contribution to this company. You want to arrange a short meeting to discuss what you can do and exchange information. Mail out two or three small batches of 6 letters during December, saying you will call to follow up within a few days. If necessary, leave a voicemail mini-commercial and say you will call them back. When you do meet, leave your resume if they want one, and better yet, get their suggestions on people they know who you could talk to. Try to meet with several companies per week before Christmas, and book some meetings ahead for January. This approach can work far faster than submitting resumes to Human Resources.

Polish your pitch - In the quieter week between Christmas and New Years, ensure every company on your list hears from you again to show your motivation, and then focus on preparing your answers to interview questions. Know the top 5 contributions you can make to the company (why they should choose you), with a story to illustrate each of your main strengths. Then practice out loud with a friend or tape recorder. Use your

voice mail to record yourself if necessary. Practice works for pro athletes - don't let real interviews be the only practice you get.

With positive steps like these, jobseekers can make an impression on people who are in a position to help. And when family and friends gather, they'll have concrete achievements to feel good about, because they are working productively - at locating a good job.

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