

Title:

ESCAPE the Holiday Productivity Blahs

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671

Summary:

It's that time of year again: the time of holiday parties, Christmas cards to write, shopping to do (even online...at work!), vacations, family commitments, and more stress. There are ways that we as leaders can counteract all of the distractions and stress and help people be as productive now as at any time of the year.

Keywords:

productivity, holidays, expectations, holiday parties, office parties, leadership, personal development, professional development, learning

Article Body:

It's that time of year again: the time of holiday parties, Christmas cards to write, shopping to do (even online...at work!), vacations, family commitments, and more stress. It is no wonder that a recent survey by Accountemps found that 44% of executives feel employees are less productive the week before a major holiday.

While this may be true, there are ways that we as leaders can counteract all of the distractions and stress and help people be as productive now as at any time of the year. Following are some suggestions to keep the focus and results high as the bells ring louder and the shopping days disappear. Rather than avoiding the challenges or denying the distractions the season offers, **ESCAPE** the problems by applying the suggestions below.

**Expect good results.** Set high expectations and you will typically get great results. Set low ones and you'll get the matching results too. As a leader, one of your responsibilities is to set clear expectations and goals for others. However successful you have been at communicating and gaining understanding on these expectations, the holidays require some additional expectation setting. Give people a sense of where they are on their annual goals, and encourage them to finish the year strong. As you set and reinforce these expectations, remember to give people the support and resources they need to succeed. And of course, lead by example. Have high expectations of yourself to finish the year strong.

**Share spirit.** While some people have a bit of a cynical, stressed out, scrooge attitude towards the holidays, most find their spirits lifted and thoughtfulness is at an annual high. Encourage people to show their spirit and sense of goodwill when communicating with others inside the organization. Even more importantly, encourage those sales people, Customer Service professionals and others who communicate with Customers to use that holiday good cheer in their interactions. Customers will notice and everyone wins.

**Celebrate!** You probably have a holiday party at a restaurant or hotel, which is great. But consider doing an on-site workday event too. There are many options - "Secret Santa", a white elephant gift exchange, or daily afternoon holiday snack break with different people bringing things each day are just three suggestions. A little time spent here can help build relationships, bring people closer together and focus them on their work for the rest of the day and week. Make sure to let people who are interested in these kinds of events plan them - don't delegate it to the unwilling or overworked because it won't have the same results.

**Acknowledge the challenges and distractions.** Let people know that you realize the holidays are a tough time of year to stay focused. Share your shopping and social calendar with them, so they understand that you feel the seasonal stress that they feel too. When people know you understand their situation, you gain credibility when talking about expectations and year end goals.

**Present positive anticipation for the New Year.** Give people something to look forward to. Get them excited about a target or project that will make a real difference early in the New Year. Giving people this forward focus will help the focus now, but will really help people past the doldrums that can come after January 1.

**Engage outside your organization.** Take the lead by organizing a group to lead a toy campaign, contribute to a food drive, or better yet, do something as a team in the community. Your group will feel proud of their efforts, pleased that their organization supported and encouraged the activity, and the team will improve their relationships which has a long term impact on team health and productivity.

These suggestions individually can help you navigate the holiday season more effectively. Taken together, however, they will help you ESCAPE the pitfalls and make December a valuable and productive close to the year and a jump start to the new one.

