

*"One organization with a long record of success in helping people find jobs is The Five O'Clock Club."*

FORTUNE

## The Holiday Job Search: Full Steam Ahead!

### ...burying the myth that the holidays are a time to slack off

by David Madison, Ph.D., Director of the National Guild of Career Coaches of The Five O'Clock Club

**N**obody likes to job search. Thus, it is so tempting to *put off* doing the things you need to do to land your next position. Even people who have very compelling reasons to get a job as quickly as possible (low bank balance, a panicked spouse) commonly find compelling reasons why they can't look for work *today*.

For chronic procrastinators, what could be better than having an excuse that lasts for almost two months? The year-end holiday season, framed by Thanksgiving and New Year's, is commonly viewed as a bad time to look for a job. Indeed, we sometimes hear that November-December is the worst time of the year for job-hunting. The usual refrain is, "Well, nothing's going to happen until January, so why bother? I might as well not waste my time." That's the conventional wisdom—we begin hearing it as soon as people have taken off their Halloween costumes.

#### ***But it's wrong***

Let's review four reasons why it is wrong. There may be more reasons, but these are enough to nail the coffin firmly shut. Then we'll turn to several suggestions for what to do during your *unrelenting* holiday job search.

#### **Managers are not waiting until January to get things moving.**

(1) One of the biggest reasons that slacking off during the holidays is wrong is that other, less savvy job hunters don't know that it's wrong. They retire from the battle and leave the field wide open.

Of course, it's not true that everyone stops job hunting, but thousands of people who ought to be out there interviewing decide to kick back and coast through the season—they believe the misinformation! What more could you want? This makes it easier for you. The last

thing you want to hear at the end of a terrific interview is,

"We have five more candidates to interview." You don't want competition. We focus a lot at The Five O'Clock Club on strategies to outclass the competition—and this is a lot easier if there aren't a lot of people in the race. You'll rarely have the field all to yourself, but in November-December it will be a lot less crowded.

(2) During the final months of the year, department managers are planning ahead—and they're not waiting for January to get things moving. Budgets and headcounts have been approved, goals for the new year have been set, and steps are already being taken to carry out plans for the next six months. If managers want new people on board in January, they know that January 1 is too late to *start* interviewing. Traditionally, January has been one of the highest hiring months for Five O'Clock Clubbers because department managers *interview in December*.

*Continued on page 3*



#### ***In this issue***

- ◆ **How to Be a Player at the Highest Levels**
- ◆ **When and How to Network**
- ◆ **Will You Get the Right Outplacement?**

# Five O'Clock Club Outplacement Beats Competitors

## GIVES JOB HUNTERS ONE YEAR OF HELP; BEST MATERIALS & COACHES



**L**oretta, a senior fund-raiser, ended up with 10 job possibilities and three concurrent offers. Her job search took five months—versus 10 weeks for our average attendee. If Loretta's employer had sent her to a traditional outplacement firm, her coaching would have ended after three months, and her coach would probably have urged her to take that first offer (so he could close her file).

Luckily for Loretta, her employer agreed to pay for Five O'Clock Club outplacement even though they usually used another firm. She was guaranteed our services for a year, and intends to come back to iron out any issues that may arise in her new job.

Luckily for Steve, his employer agreed to pay for Five O'Clock Club outplacement even though they usually used another firm. She was guaranteed our services for a year, and intends to come back to iron out any issues that may arise in her new job. What would have happened to Steve, a human resources executive, if his employer had not allowed him to use The Five O'Clock Club as his outplacement provider? He had a two-year program with us. After 20 years in human resources, he thought he'd try the operations area. Within six weeks at the Club, he landed a prestigious, long-term consulting assignment in operations. With traditional outplacement, that would have been the end of his outplacement. But the Club approach offers flexibility so job hunters can try new areas. After seven months, Steve wanted to get back into human resources. His first three offers were terrific, but something nagged at both him and his coach: They were not exactly the best move

for him. Steve has since gotten four more offers and will soon select the one that positions him best for the long term.

Our mantra: "Do what's in the best interests of the job hunter," rather than being eager to declare success at the first offer or consulting assignment. The Club's approach is the *opposite* of that used by traditional outplacement firms:

- All of our packages are for a minimum of one year and cost less than a three-month package elsewhere. You can try a new field. If you *lose* your next job, you can come back! You are protected from bad choices or bad luck.
- All job hunters have a *guaranteed* number of hours of private coaching. The "unlimited" coaching offered by other firms means you are likely to get very little. Clients cannot get in to see their coaches. Instead, they are urged to take webinars and e-learning.
- Five O'Clock Club coaches are given an incentive to spend the allotted hours with each job hunter. If a client is allotted 8 or 14 hours of private coaching, he or she has a year to use those hours.
- Our research shows that those who regularly attend a Five O'Clock Club small group get jobs faster and at higher rates of pay than those who only work with their coach privately. That's because everyone in the small group studies our

books and CDs, based on 25 years of research "as if they were in graduate school."

Everyone speaks the same language, and each person in the strategy group goes away with an assignment: the most important thing they need to do this very next week to move their search along.

Who uses us? Employers who care about what happens to their employees and want them to have the best. That's us! ●

Kate Wendleton, Editor-in-Chief

### THE FIVE O'CLOCK NEWS

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(3) This is not rocket science: You may have noticed that business does not shut down during the last six weeks of the year. The stock market doesn't close for November-December, banks don't stop taking deposits, and sales people continue right on making calls and closing deals. So does anyone really think that hiring managers won't read new résumés that land on their desks ("Well, golly, I can't look at these until January")? Of course not. It's business as usual, holidays or not. Certainly there are distractions, but office parties and holiday shopping remain extracurricular activities. If there is hiring to be done, it will be done.

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**Don't let anything—  
especially the season—  
cripple your momentum.**

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(4) You don't want to lose momentum! If you have a great job search going on in October—or even a tentative one—November is not the time to go on vacation. It would be a disaster to let the momentum dissipate. The failure of momentum, in fact, is the great saboteur of the job-hunt process at any time of the year. When people fail to have lots of things in the works, they concentrate on the one great job that they really want—and they're devastated when they come in second or the company puts a freeze on hiring. It takes two or three weeks to dig out of depression, because one is in a dead calm. Putting all hope and effort on that one great job means that you can have no momentum. Don't let anything—especially the season—cripple momentum.

### Your Best Friend in Strategizing the Holiday Job Search. . .

The weeks ahead are precious, so you want to make them count.

Wouldn't it be great if you had some way to figure out if you're conducting a good search? Obviously, when you land a job you can say, "My job hunt techniques worked"—but as you're slogging along week after week, *then* is when you need to know if they're working. Are you doing the right things? After all, many people end up with jobs *despite* making false starts and needless mistakes. "I landed a job" is not

really the true test of having done a good, efficient and effective search. Some people just get lucky—by which they mean they landed a new job—all the while admitting it's not really the right job or a great job.

The good news is that The Five O'Clock Club *does* have a tool to help you assess your search. We call it **Stages 1, 2 & 3**, and it can be your best friend. Before we discuss what you can do in your job search during the holidays, it's a good idea to describe **Stages 1, 2 & 3**, so that you can frame your strategies accordingly.

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**Use all of your ingenuity to  
find reasons to stay  
in touch with people.**

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What do the Stages mean? It took several years for The Five O'Clock Club to hammer out and perfect this assessment tool, so it's worth mastering. It could mean all the difference in making the holidays pay off!

Simply put, you have achieved Stage 1 when you are in touch with *6 to 10 people in your target markets on an on-going basis*. This is simple, but it's also tough. You might be surprised at how many people arrive at The Five O'Clock Club after many months of a stalled search, and we point out to them that they're not even in Stage 1 yet. They're shocked and annoyed by such a thing! We might hear that they've sent out hundreds of résumés and networked with dozens of people, but they're frustrated and exhausted because "nothing's worked."

The clouds begin to clear when we point out that many of those résumés haven't really been aimed at clear and realistic targets, and the job-hunter has failed to keep in touch with all of those networking contacts on an on-going basis. It turns out that getting to Stage 1 requires a lot of focused effort, because you need to use all of your ingenuity to find reasons to stay in touch with people—so that they can be included on your list of Stage 1 contacts. Many months of job-hunt labor, the kind claimed by distraught and frustrated newcomers to The Five O'Clock Club, may simply be unstrategic—or even mindless busywork—and thus is not as impressive as it sounds. When you can genuinely say that you have a healthy Stage 1 going, things can begin to

happen.

You have achieved Stage 2 when you are in touch with 6 to 10 people in your target markets, on an on-going basis, AND people are saying to you, "Gee, I wish we had an opening right now—I'd love to have someone like you on board." In other words, you're getting affirmation that you're doing the right things. You are (1) meeting with the right people at the right levels, and (2) positioning yourself correctly. You're on the right track!

But if you go on meeting after meeting, and *don't* hear that people would like to hire you, then *something is wrong*: your targets are wrong, your positioning is wrong, or you are interviewing poorly (failing to act like a consultant is one big mistake). Something needs to be fixed. Thinking in terms of what it takes to achieve Stage 2 helps you to identify the mistakes that may be sabotaging your search.

You have arrived in Stage 3 when you are in touch with 6 to 10 people on an on-going basis who are discussing real jobs with you—or the possibility of creating a job for you. Don't obsess about Stage 3—it will take care of itself if you obsess about Stage 2.

The full worksheets to help you visualize and track your Stage 1, 2 & 3 efforts can be found at the back of our book, *Shortcut Your Job Search: The Best Ways to Get Interviews*.

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**Measure your search in terms  
of Stages 1, 2 and 3, or  
many months of job-hunt  
labor may prove to be  
mindless busywork.**

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### How to *Improve* Your Job Search During November and December

So, what to do during these final weeks of the year? All of the four suggestions to be discussed below can have a large payoff; they're all practical and realistic. In no case can you say, "You expect me to do *that* during the holidays?"

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**Don't obsess about Stage 3—  
it will take care of itself  
if you obsess about Stage 2.**

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**1. Reconnect with everyone during the next few weeks:** remind people who you are, what you do, and what you're trying to accomplish.

Notice that a constant theme in Stages 1, 2 & 3 is being in touch with people "on an on-going basis"—this is crucial to success. If this element is missing, you're in trouble. Many job searches stall because people lack the discipline to keep in touch, or just lose interest in doing so. One Club member sent out "gratitude e-mails" in December to everyone whom he'd networked with during the previous months. This prompted one of his contacts to forward his résumé to someone else, which resulted in an interview—and his new job. The simple truth is that people forget about you if you slip off the radar screen. The holidays are, in fact, an ideal time to touch base with everyone to extend good wishes—and give an update on your situation.

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**You can put a lot of holiday time into building your target map.**

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**2. Devote a few hours each week to expanding, defining and refining your targets.**

This takes time and hard work—and there's nothing happening during the holidays to impede this. The excuse that, "Everyone out there is too busy," should have no bearing whatever on your ability to hunker down at the computer and do more research. Remember you're aiming to identify 200 positions—to end up with multiple offers and a great job (not just one you'll settle for). This usually requires expanding your targets: Our coaches are always urging and prodding clients to do this. Your job search will be hobbled if your targets are skimpy or sloppy.

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**Touch base with everyone to extend good wishes—and give an update on your situation.**

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You can expand targets by: (1) reviewing your assessment exercises—maybe there's something you've overlooked; (2) brainstorming with your job-search buddies

and your group; and (3) doing more Internet research, which can include identifying more second- and third-tier companies to contact. Many people are amazed to discover companies they never knew about—organizations that aren't rich and famous, but may be great places to work. If you can end up with a map of 200 positions spread over several targets, you'll be getting closer to achieving a healthy Stage 2—in which you're talking to 6 to 10 of the right people at the right levels. If you have a weak Stage 2, refocus on the breadth and depth of your targets. Take a look at Aaron's target map on page 5. By expanding his targets, he will be able to reach his goal of identifying 200 positions. You can put a lot of holiday time into building your target map.

**3. If you've neglected one or two of the ways to get meetings, work on all four:** ads, search firms, networking and direct contact.

We know that job hunters tend to favor ads and search firms, so we usually urge them to get better at networking and, toughest of all—because it is labor intensive—reach out directly to companies...as many as your research uncovers. Hence, launching a targeted mail campaign is an ideal holiday pursuit. It takes time to research companies, create intelligent cover letters and make the follow-up phone calls a few days later.

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**Hunker down at the computer and do more research.**

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There are five weeks between Thanksgiving and New Year's; imagine the impact of sending out 10 targeted letters each of those weeks. You will have a very busy holiday job search if you do this, and it would be remarkable if you don't end up with a healthy Stage 2. (See the box on page 5 for the definition of a Targeted Mailing.)

Maybe, however, you've slighted the newspaper ads, because responding to ads has never worked very well for you. Spend a couple of hours scanning the ads anyway, but not just to look for openings. People *do* get interviews through the ads (especially if they follow The Five O'Clock Club template for cover letters), however you may spot trends in the kinds of jobs being advertised and the salaries offered. You

may also see ads placed by companies you've already been targeting, which should prompt you to use your own networking contacts to get an introduction to the company.

**4. Attend your weekly group at The Five O'Clock Club consistently.**

One of the primary goals of your group is to make sure your search is moving forward. Skipping sessions works against this purpose. When the coach asks, "What's happening in your search this week?," the right answer never is, "Well, I don't have a job yet." A right answer is an evaluation of your progress: "I have 12 Stage 1 contacts, six good ones in Stage 2, and I'm working to get a couple of those into Stage 3." *The group wants to hear an honest assessment*—and will help to brainstorm how to get more things going in each stage. With this goal in mind everyone leaves with an assignment, to help maintain their momentum. Attending your group throughout the holiday season—either at one of the in-person or telephone branches—will help sustain the momentum.

Remember: you're looking for the January payoff.

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**Make sure your search is moving forward by attending the Club every week.**

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**Looking Ahead: There is No Such Thing as a Bad Holiday**

If procrastinators are fond of excusing themselves from a year-end job search because hiring supposedly goes downhill after Halloween, then their favorite time of the year is probably summer. June, July and August combined are frequently declared the summer holiday and we hear that "nothing is going to happen until after Labor Day." Accordingly, a lot of people head for the beach, telling themselves that they'll get back to the job market when the season changes. Of course it's a good bet that there'll be another excuse when the Tuesday after Labor Day arrives. Setting an arbitrary date when you will finally tackle an unpleasant task invites only dread and more delay. In fact, there is no bad season for your job search. No matter what month it is, there are always things you can do to move yourself through Stages 1, 2 & 3 and

end up in your new job. In the good old summertime, with most of your competition relaxing at the beach, you can work the job market productively.

**There is no bad season for your job search. There's always more you can do to move yourself through Stages 1, 2 & 3.**

**When to Use the “Holiday Excuse”**

There is one time, however, when you can play the holidays-are-bad-news card. If you lose your job as the holidays are approaching, and you're negotiating for the best possible severance and outplacement deal, be sure to tell your department manager or the human resources officer that it's a tough time to be looking for a job: "You know, with the holidays just around the corner, it's a rotten time to send out résumés. I'll be facing an uphill battle and nothing will happen for months." Since *nearly everybody believes this*, you might be able to pump up your departure package.

But *you* know that you're just being a good negotiator—and you also know that the holidays are a great time to be in the job market. In other words, full steam



**The Five O’Clock Club Method of Job Hunting by Target:**

A target is:

- 1) An industry
- 2) Job or function
- 3) Geographic area

Aaron has been a Director of Development for a charity. He loves fundraising, and has come up with several targets in the not-for-profit world. In four targets alone he has identified 105 positions:



**Target One:**

Fund Raising Manager, cultural institutions, Boston (20 positions).



**Target Two:**

Fund Raising Manager, cultural institutions, New York (25 positions).



**Target Three:**

Fund Raising Manager, colleges and universities, Boston (30 positions).



**Target Four:**

Fund Raising Manager, colleges and universities, New York (30 positions).

- To reach the ideal of 200 positions, Aaron can **add targets**, perhaps charities that fight diseases in New York and Boston—or if possible, charities, cultural institutions and colleges in Washington. . . that's five more targets, with 20 to 30 positions in each.
- Using this map of organized and prioritized targets, Aaron can explore the market effectively and work toward reaching a healthy **Stage 2**.

**What’s the Difference Between a Direct Mail Campaign and a Targeted Mail Campaign?**

**Direct Mail** is designed to blanket a target market:

- You send cover letters and résumés to perhaps 60 to 200 managers, simply to get your name out there.
- The cover letter is well thought out, but is not customized to each organization.
- No follow-up phone calls are planned.

A **Targeted Mailing** is sent to 15 to 30 organizations that you have keen interest in—and have researched in depth:

- The opening paragraph of the cover letter is tailored to each organization: you explain why you have an interest in its business or product. This is the grabber—it demonstrates your knowledge and connection with the industry and the organization.
- Your bulleted accomplishments (the third paragraph in the Five O’Clock Club template for cover letters) can also be modified for each organization.
- In your final paragraph, promise a follow-up phone call.
- Make the phone calls! This can be the hardest part of a targeted mail campaign. Get help on this from your group and your job search buddies.



*"Since I plan on working for your company for the next 20 years, I was hoping to get all my paychecks up front."*