

Job Talk: 'Tis the season for networking among friends

By Janet Farley, Special to Stars and Stripes

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OK, so maybe there isn't a Santa Claus on every corner in that place you call home this year. There are, however, other influential individuals in your life who you can and should reach out to this holiday season as you try to advance your career or land a job. Call it your own personal networking campaign, sprinkled with a touch of holiday cheer and you'll find your search for a better life still on track in the new year, despite this traditional work downtime.

Consider these possibilities:

Holiday cards

You may be dreading the annual holiday card-writing fiesta you've been procrastinating. You would not be alone, trust me. Perhaps we need to look that dreaded task in a new light.

Let's face it. Everyone loves to hear from friends and family this time of year. Come on. Don't you really, really want to know what happened to your close family friend's gallbladder after last year's detailed letter about it? The suspense is almost too much, huh? If you can bring yourself to get past the over-informative details that are often returned to you, you may find that the person that belongs to that faulty gallbladder is quite connected professionally and may be able to point you in the direction of a potential job.

To work this angle, you have to do your part first. You have to let everyone know on your greeting card list that you are seeking career advancement in some shape or form. Go ahead and ask your trusted recipients for any leads and

thank them in advance. You just might get the lead you've been looking for!

Holiday parties

Not only can you network from afar, you also can do it up close and in person, compliments of your office, club or school holiday parties. There will be plenty of opportunities to bake, cook, eat and chitchat with a variety of individuals who may be able to assist you in your career quest. Tips for success here □ avoid making a fool of yourself by not over-indulging in the spiked punch and be sure to talk to everyone not just the people you actually like.

Don't limit your conversations, well-wishes and subtle networking to just those in your own organization, either. Chat it up with those you coordinate with from other organizations (dare I say competitors as well) and those who just happen to be physically located next to your office, regardless of their business.

Potential employers

Drop a holiday card to any potential employer with whom you have some type relationship already established. Either you know this person already and want to keep your name on his or her brain or maybe you have interviewed with him and are patiently awaiting a hiring decision. Maybe you will be contacting this person soon for a job and you just want to grease the proverbial skids in advance. No matter. Take advantage of basic goodwill and score a few brownie points in the process.

More tips to consider

Pamela M. McBride, a friend, fellow writer and co-author of □Work It, Girl! The Black Woman's Guide to Professional Success, □ offers these additional steps to effective holiday networking activities.

- Don't network in crisis mode. Networking is about relationships and relationships take time. Come to the table with something to give, not just wanting to take.
- Instead of trying to meet a whole lot of new □contacts□ during the holiday festivities, try to re-connect with

people with whom you have been out of touch and invite them to lunch or dinner to catch up.

- Focus on a two-way exchange of what's new. It's not only about what's in it for you, but be mindful that you should think of how you can help them, too.

Congratulations! You now have your networking survival basics for this holiday season. While you're out there wheeling and dealing for your future, don't forget to enjoy yourself and remember the reason for the season. Happy Holidays!

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