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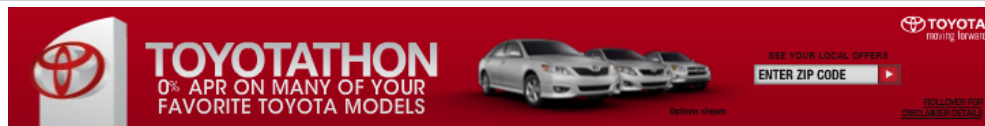
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Office Parties, Holiday Job Hunting

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
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OFFICE PARTIES: Conquering the holiday office party doesn't just mean keeping track of how much you drink. Seasonal social events can be the best opportunity to network within your company, so you may want to consider veering away from the buffet line.

"Whether you're the life of the party or full of social anxiety when it comes to holiday events, it's important that you go into them armed and ready to make the most of your time with every holiday well-wisher you encounter," said Maribeth Kuzmeski, author of the recently published book "The Connectors: How the World's Most Successful Businesspeople Build Relationships and Win Clients for Life."

Kuzmeski gives these tips for maximizing workplace merrymaking:

-- Everyone from your company's CEO to your top client's boss are likely to come out of the woodwork for this party. Think about which contacts are the most important to you, and make a point to speak to each of them over the course of the night. Do some research ahead of time to learn about the attendees so you are prepared to engage in conversation with them.

-- Ask questions and be sure to have more in your arsenal than small talk. After you've asked about how they'll spend the holidays, move on to more in-depth business questions such as what they see as their biggest work-related challenges, the best thing to happen to their business this year or something they've done to change their career.

-- Be prepared to pitch yourself in 15 seconds. Resist the urge to give a long introduction, and instead highlight your career and top skills. Be creative and think about how you can frame your accomplishments in a way that gets other guests' attention.

-- The party may end, but your connection shouldn't. Keep track of all the connections you've made, including reminders of interesting or remarkable things that people said or that you learned so that you can refer to them in later conversations. Be proactive and use social media to keep in touch.

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS?: The holidays are no time to slow down your job search. In fact, those who continue seeking work may find it's less competitive, easier to reach hiring managers and a good opportunity to nestle into the front of the line for openings in

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the new year.

True, company recruiters are likely taking time off and slowing down their hiring efforts from Thanksgiving to New Year's. But if a large number of candidates assume it's safe to take a break from the job hunt, those who don't may find a job in their stocking, says Tony Lee, publisher of job search site CareerCast.com.

The site lists these reasons you should keep applying rather than crying in your egg nog:

-- Not only do many candidates withdraw from the job market over the holidays, but those who are considering a job change usually stay put to make sure they receive year-end bonuses and vacation time they've accrued.

-- Hiring decision makers are less likely to be traveling as the holidays approach. Instead, they're focused on finishing projects, cleaning out files, meeting with colleagues and attending holiday gatherings.

-- Everyone is a little happier at the holidays, so leverage that good will to your advantage when trying to schedule interviews.

-- Avoid the rush. New Year's is full of reminders to start fresh, turn over a new leaf and set new career goals. Beat all of those to the punch by maintaining your job search through the holidays, and you'll be on board by the time others are making their first calls.

GETTING BACK FROM CHARITY: Sure, you give to charity because you're compassionate. All the same, you want to make sure you get federal tax rewards for your year-end contributions.

"Generosity is its own reward, but that doesn't mean you should miss out on the tax benefits of your gifts," said Justin Ransome, a partner in the national tax office for the accounting firm Grant Thornton LLP. "Many people don't realize how detailed the charitable giving rules actually are."

Grant Thornton gives these tips for claiming a charitable contribution deduction on a tax return:

-- For contributions of cash or property, always get a receipt from the charity. For contributions of property, the receipt will need to reflect the fair value of the property donated.

-- Reporting forms can vary depending on how large your donation is. For example, if you have made a gift of property in excess of \$500, you must file Form 8283. If the gift of property is in excess of \$500,000, a qualified appraisal must be attached to your income tax return.

-- Understand that deductions are only given up to a certain percentage of your adjusted gross income -- usually 20 percent to 50 percent. You can carry over the excess amount for the next five years.

-- Make sure your donations are made to an organization qualified to receive deductible contributions. The Web site for the Internal Revenue Service lists most qualified organizations. Political groups that participate in campaigns or attempt to influence legislation are not qualified.



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-- Do not include raffle tickets or bingo. Tickets to fundraising events can be deducted if

the charity provides a monetary value for the event that's less than what you paid.

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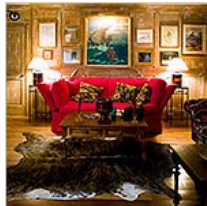
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