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How to Get a Job Over the Holidays

The National Retail Federation estimates that the average American will spend more than \$800 on holiday purchases this year. To get some of the dough to cover your spending, it's not too late to become a hired hand for the holidays.

This year retailers are expected to add 600,000 people to their payrolls by the end of December. That may sound like a lot, but it's a drop from last year. The decrease in holiday hiring can be attributed to a cautious economic outlook and the desire among current employees -- both full and part-time -- to take on more hours during the holidays. Wal-Mart, for example, the nation's largest retailer, said its stores planned to add just 20,000 to 25,000 seasonal workers this year, which is half what the giant hired last year.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR JOBS

There are three key categories where the most opportunity exists for December:

Retail. I randomly called more than three dozen stores at major chains throughout the country, including Best Buy, The Container Store, Victoria's Secret, Target, and Wal-Mart among several others, and every one of them said they still had some openings. In each case, I was encouraged to apply in person at the store nearest to me and/or to apply online.

Shipping. Both DHL and UPS say they're still hiring and will be through the New Year. UPS, for example, hires seasonal drivers, helpers and package sorters. UPS alone will hire 60,000 seasonal workers -- and a quarter of them will eventually get hired on fulltime. Find UPS positions at www.upsjobs.com and DHL openings at www.dhl-usa.com/careers.

Restaurants. They need more staff because more people are celebrating by eating out. Think office parties and family festivities. The big chains all said they were hiring in various locations when I called, but don't overlook your local hot spots either.

HOW TO GET HIRED

To increase your chances of getting hired, keep three things in mind:

Flexibility. You can't walk in and demand the cushy shifts; they're already taken. This means be ready to work late nights, possibly overnights, and weekends.

Enthusiasm. Grinches need not apply. Cheerful, sunny dispositions are a must -- along with a willingness to handle all kinds of customers. Even if you haven't had customer service experience, but you've been a teacher or you've worked in some capacity where you understand different personalities, that's a plus.

Knowledge: If you've shopped in the store or eaten in the restaurant, show your affinity. It means you'll require less training and you're much more likely to be hired over someone who couldn't care less about the difference between lingerie or electronics.

Most of these seasonal positions are hourly. Depending on location and experience, expect to earn an average of between \$7.50 and \$15 an hour.

OTHER IDEAS

Beyond the basics, consider some alternatives to the traditional hiring options.

Temporary agencies. Kelly Services, Manpower, Adecco, Snelling, and Administaff all hire seasonal workers to fill in for vacationing staffers or to help handle all kinds of year-end tasks. Many staffing firms even do placements at warehouses for holiday packaging. Check with the local staffing firms in your area for their immediate openings.

Sitters. Babysitters and pet sitters are in demand because of holiday parties and holiday travel. Sittercity.com is one Web site that sees a surge in demand among parents for New Year's Eve childcare, which is a night where you can charge a hefty premium for your services. That's because the usual sitters will have their own party plans. Register at Sittercity.com [...] to create a profile and describe your availability and your rates. You can even specify the ages of kids you're willing to care for or the types of pets you'd look after.

Santa's helpers. If you're entrepreneurial, this could be great for you. Pitch your availability to family and friends -- especially busy working women (and men!) -- to let them know you'll fight traffic, find a parking space and stand in long lines to pick up their holiday purchases. Offer to wrap them and even ship to out of town recipients. Offer to help setup and clean up their holiday parties. Many people would gladly pay \$10 or \$12 an hour for such help to save their sanity from the holiday stressors.

Job boards. Search the major job boards now by using the keyword "seasonal" in your city. Many results will turn up on CareerBuilder.com, HotJobs.com, Monster.com and others. Click through them to see what seems appealing to you.

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