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Susan Tompor: Holiday jobs can help you land a steady gig later

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Picking up a holiday job is certainly one way to cover the bills. But plenty of people would like to turn those seasonal jobs into more paychecks in 2012.

"It's definitely an opportunity to have a foot in the door," said Eddie Baeb, a spokesperson for Target in Minneapolis.

What kind of hiring any business does this holiday season -- and next year -- will obviously depend on how well sales are going and where the U.S. economy heads overall.

But experts say seasonal workers can have an edge if hiring gradually picks up in 2012.

The trick is finding that seasonal job and making sure to stand out to be considered for a job next holiday season or during the next round of openings.

"You have to have a positive attitude and you have to want to do a good job," said Brenda Bradke, who has been hired as a seasonal drivers helper for UPS for the past 15 years.

United Parcel Service expects seasonal hiring in Michigan to hit 2,109 with a little more than half of those workers being in the Detroit, Ann Arbor and Flint areas.

Nationwide, UPS plans on hiring 55,000 seasonal workers -- up 10% from last year. Over the years, a holiday job at UPS has been the first step for many for a full-time job -- or return work the next holiday season.

Target expects to hire 92,000 seasonal workers nationwide, slightly more than last year. Holiday hiring at Target is continuing into mid-December.

Nationwide, Target hired nearly 40% or 35,800 of its seasonal workers later for regular, year-round jobs last year. That was nearly double the amount hired for regular work the previous year and well more than double for the year before that.

The company said it does not know how many seasonal workers could stay on. Opportunities would vary markedly from store to store and depend on sales forecasts and turnover of current year-round employees. "Last year, it was a really big number for us," Baeb said.

Ho-ho-ho attitude can help you keep job after holiday

The holiday hiring season is becoming less so-so and more ho-ho. But to get hired, people need to pay attention to what's happening at a business -- as well as unique aspects of the job.

Retail employment nationally grew by a non-seasonally adjusted 141,500 jobs in October, according to an analysis by global outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas. That nearly matched the 144,100 retail jobs added in October 2010.

Some, like Challenger, say the holiday jobs outlook could be a tad weaker than last season. But other experts say holiday hiring could be stronger.

It all depends where you look -- and how you approach the job.

Blair Early, 26, was hired as holiday help at Moosejaw Mountaineering during the midst of the recession in October 2008.

But he's been working there ever since, and he now is a customer service supervisor at the outdoor retailer.

"The key for me is that I didn't treat it as a seasonal job," said Early, who graduated with a communications degree from Michigan State University in December 2007.

He paid attention to a new customer rewards system that would only be in place in the spring after seasonal hires left -- and he understood how that system would work. "Commit yourself to being there for the long haul," he said. "If you're not fully committed, it's going to show in your work -- and then you're going to be a seasonal employee."

Moosejaw plans to hire about 195 employees during the holiday season -- with most of the people already hired.

Many who are hiring for the holidays say they're looking for people who have that spark.

"If they don't have a positive attitude, it would be bad for our culture," said Dave Cesarina, a franchise owner with four Domino's stores in Ann Arbor. He's hired about 20 people since holiday hiring began in September and is looking for another 20 hires.

Cesarina said employers would rather keep a holiday hire than try to train someone new, if possible.

"Retention would save a small business -- especially my business -- money," he said, noting that it can cost \$700 or more to train an employee.

Just Baked co-founder Pam Turkin says she's hiring holiday help and keeping an eye out for people who will want to working into 2012, too, because more stores will open before the end of March.

If you're a grouchy person -- and she says they've had a few employees who were -- it's not going to work well when it comes to selling cupcakes.

"People come in there to feel better," she said.

Virginia Green, 34, said she's found it helpful to keep a smile on her face, even during hectic holiday moments.

Green has a full-time job during the day at a municipal office but took an extra job at Target last holiday to help pay bills after her husband injured his back at work.

And Green, who lives in Roseville and has three daughters, was able to keep a job at Target well into the new year. She plans to cover some college expenses for her eldest daughter Taylor, 17, who was just accepted to Michigan State University.

Frank Oldani, store team leader for the Target in Clinton Township, said Virginia Green's ability to excel at customer service made her a standout on day No. 1.

"We're looking for the next Virginia to keep on," Oldani said.

About 10% of the 2010 seasonal workforce is now employed at Toys R Us, according to Katie Reczek, a spokeswoman.

Toys R Us plans to hire more than 40,000 employees nationwide this holiday season, including more than 1,200 in Michigan. Hiring continues throughout November, but concludes by Thanksgiving.

How many are hired for the holiday depends on business. For UPS, holiday hiring depends in part on how much people go online to shop this year.

UPS is looking to fill seasonal package handling jobs that can range in pay from \$8.50 to \$9.50 an hour.

Driver helpers earn \$12.88 per hour.

"Online shopping seems to be increasing every year -- and obviously that impacts what has to be delivered," said Greg Kelley, human resources operations manager for the UPS Great Lakes district, which covers all of Michigan and a large part of Ohio.

"I was a Christmas hire. I started as a helper in 1985," Kelley added.

A jump in online orders has FedEx hiring 20,000 workers to deliver holiday packages, up 18% from last year. FedEx will add more than 500 seasonal positions in the Detroit area.

Turning a holiday job into something more, though, requires paying attention to how that company works.

There are correct ways to do any job -- including getting on and off a UPS truck.

"You don't just jump up -- you don't just jump off," said Brenda Bradke, 43, a 15-year holiday employee for UPS.

If you see a dog bowl outside a house, UPS helpers are told to pay attention because there could be a dog. Are there holiday decorations that could trip you as you walk to the door? "Thinking ahead is the No. 1 key to success."

Appearance is key, too.

"You want to make sure you look the part," she says. Bradke works with her husband, Joseph, who is a full-time UPS driver.

During good years, she's made around \$1,500 during the holidays. The couple has two children, ages 16 and 19, and uses the holiday money lately for their 19-year-old daughter's college education. "Every year, they ask me if I would like to come back, and I do," she said.
