

How Successful Companies Survive The Holiday Slump And Stay Productive

Lydia Dishman, Fast Company 12/21/12

A plethora of practical advice to enhance your teams' performance through the holidays and beyond.

The last few weeks of the year you'll find plenty of business leaders busy wrapping up financials and checking their lists of future goals twice. Their staff may be singing a different tune. A recent survey from shows that 30 percent of workers were planning to shop online for gifts this month, while over 60 percent are using the web for non-work emails, research, and social networking. That's a lot of juggling amid the predictable jingling and raising a cup (or three) of good cheer.

Trying to maintain decorum while dealing with the inevitable dip in productivity may have managers wringing hands. *Fast Company* says fret not. Our gift to you, dear readers, is a plethora of practical advice to enhance your teams' performance through the holidays and beyond, from a group of super-successful folks *Fast Company* has interviewed this year.

Carson Tate, managing partner of Working Simply

"Accept and embrace the madness. It sounds counterintuitive, however, it actually works. At this time of year, there is a buzz in offices across the country. Tap into this extra energy and let it inspire, energize, and excite you. Insights occur more frequently when you are happy. Leverage the happiness in the office and conduct a brainstorming session on a particularly challenging issue. You might be surprised by the innovative sparking of ideas."

Seth Priebatsch, founder and chief ninja at LevelUp

"We ask a ton from our team every day. People show up early, leave late and are probably still thinking about work even when they're at home. That's the blessing (and curse) of working at a startup. Your work is super rewarding, but you have to work all the time. So, during the holidays, we try to give people the

time they need and want to unwind. We have a totally un-metered vacation schedule so people take whatever time they need.

Ours is a culture where people are brainstorming ideas all the time. All our walls and windows are whiteboards, even some of our desks. Some people like to go on break and brainstorm actively. Others like to go on break and shut off for a bit. Honestly, that's as productive as anything else. Sometimes the creative part of the brain just needs a bit of downtime to re-charge.

When the team comes back from break, we hope they feel energized, recharged, and ready to rock 2013. We have our holiday party in January and fly our whole team in from all seven offices around the country. The holidays are already too jam-packed for everyone. So rather than celebrating the hectic end to a year, we choose to celebrate the beginning of an even more epic one!"

Ken Carbone, chief creative director, Carbone Smolan Agency

"Each year it's the same story. After we recover from stuffing ourselves with Thanksgiving Day stuffing, we line up at the starting line for the mad dash to the end of the year. And this year, following the presidential election, it's more intense than ever. The inert became active. Dead projects were resurrected. Clients want to spend their budgets this year. And, everything is due yesterday. I call it "The Great Compression."

This is also an energizing period where you are blasted by holiday distractions from all directions. Lights, camera, shopping! I find that our designers thrive on the added adrenalin. We always close the office for a week after Christmas and re-open on January 2. This is incredibly motivating to our staff and they work fiendishly to finish all of their work. Enjoying a work free week is a great reward. What I also find encouraging is that even with the increased work load people find plenty of time to party. This year in New York parties are everywhere. It's been like "designer's gone wild" at Mardi Gras! "

Rich Rao, director of Google Apps for the SMB and EDU markets

"Let unimportant emails lie. Take advantage of Priority Inbox to sift through important emails that intelligently and automatically float to the top of your inbox. Ninja tip: If you've spent time building your Google+ circles, you can quickly use them to filter your mail, saving yourself from having to sift through that pile of daily deal emails and newsletters while looking for an important update from the 'coworker' circle."

Will Young, director, Zappos Labs

"One of the ways our Zappos Labs team keeps our creative energies up is

participating in our Holiday Helper program. Zappos is pretty well known for having all employees go through four weeks of Customer Loyalty Team training (aka our call center) when we start. But all Zappos employees also do 10 hours on the phones over the holidays. This includes our San Francisco Zappos Labs team. A few of us have gone already and the rest of us will do it in the new year helping people with all their returns and exchanges. Our Holiday Helper program is a great opportunity for us to reconnect with our customers, remind us how important service is, and even inspire new project ideas for our team."

Jodee Kozlak, executive vice president of human resources, Target Corporation

"At Target, the holiday season is an important time of year for our business, and it's also an exciting time for the Target team, as we get to see the hard work of the past year come to life for our guests. During this busy season, we take extra steps to ensure our team members feel supported and stay energized. In our stores, we encourage participation in team meals and leaders bring in treats and snacks to keep the team going. We also know that giving back to others is a great way to stay motivated. Target offers a variety of volunteer opportunities including our Heroes & Helpers event, a program where we partner with public safety agencies to help in-need youth shop for the holidays. At our headquarters, teams also volunteer together in lieu of holiday parties--a wonderful opportunity to serve our communities and celebrate the season."

Carson Tate, managing partner, Working Simply

"Just stop. Stop revising the copy for the website, stop trying to individually file all of the messages from 2012, stop putting one more to-do on your task list when you are at capacity. Stop. Now take a breath and reevaluate. You typically retrieve less than 10 percent of a prior year's email messages. Bulk file them in a folder labeled 2012. If the item you wanted to add to your list is not due until January 6th, put it on the task list for the week you return to the office."

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