

METROWEST BUSINESS



[WRITE ON THE MONEY]

Christmas crazy, business savvy

Business and personal lives blend more than ever during December.

Holiday parties in the office, friends from work at your family's open house, and the quick on-line shopping session snuck in on



Maureen Condon
LOCAL COLUMNIST

the job – it's the crazy, fun time of year where we all add extra things to our already full calendars. The good news is that all of these activities offer communications lessons that can carry us for the entire new year.

Here are a few examples of Christmas traditions that hold business lessons.

We surprise

Who doesn't love the amazed look on a child's face or the delighted expression of a friend when the perfect gift is opened? The holidays are full of whispered conversations as loved ones try to surprise someone with a great present, an unexpected visit home or some other treat.

Surprises – the good kind – also are appreciated in business. When was the last time you sent a great referral source a token of your appreciation? Or had flowers delivered to a longtime client just because you're grateful for her business? Given an employee a Friday off for a job well done? These unexpected gestures go a long way to communicating important messages to your valued clients, employees and colleagues.

We decorate

Drive down any street and you'll see twinkling lights, wreaths and holiday decorations adorning many homes – some are more tasteful than others, but each represents the owner's unique style and speaks to their personality. In your business life, your personal and company brand sends a message too.

You may prefer an understated, professional look if you work in a financial or legal field. If you are in marketing or hospitality, though, you can get away with something a little more bold and colorful. The key to success is making sure that your brand says what you want it to about who you are and what differentiates you from the competition. From your business cards to your website to your marketing collateral and social media pages, make sure that your image helps you to shine.

We send cards

Many of us groan and grumble about this activity every year – getting a picture done, choosing the card, buying the stamps and addressing the envelopes is a time consuming endeavor. And as much as I like to join in the complaining, I do love seeing the pictures of family and friends each year and reading the holiday messages from those who still write them. The ones that mean the most, however, because they are so rare these days, are the ones that are personalized and handwritten.

Keeping in touch keeps you close to those who are important. In business, it's easier than ever to stay connected,

with LinkedIn Updates, Facebook posts, tweets and e-mail campaigns. But a personal outreach can make an even bigger impact. Consider choosing a few people each week who are important to your company or your career and connecting with them via a phone call or handwritten note.

E-mail will do, too, if you personalize it enough but the other two methods are more powerful. This activity does not have to take a lot of time and it can reap big rewards by keeping your business relationships fresh and current.

We reminisce

My four grandparents adored Christmas and every year I find myself fondly remembering wonderful holiday moments with them, from the handmade Cabbage Patch doll my grandmother gave my dad one year to the joke my grandfather used to make every year that we'd better get his picture opening presents because "This could my last Christmas!" These days, I love to see my daughters creating great Christmas memories with their four grandparents and I know that as adults, they will reminisce about these special holiday times.

In our professional lives, the focus so often seems to be on moving forward, as fast as we can. But taking the time to look back to see how far you've come can enrich your company and your career. One of our employees is a recent college grad and my business partner and I found ourselves recently sharing stories of our early career days with him as a way of encouraging him professionally.

Looking back was enjoyable for us and valuable for him.

Take some time to look back once in a while, so you can take some of the lessons you've learned into the future in a more thoughtful way.

We carry on traditions

My father's Christmas is not complete unless he spends an evening in front of "It's a Wonderful Life" and reads "Twas the Night Before Christmas" to his six grandchildren on Christmas eve. My mother has given my siblings and me a new Christmas ornament every year, and opening these when I decorate my tree is one of my favorite parts of the season. Traditions are a huge part of Christmas for many families. They are comforting and constant, and they keep us connected.

Creating traditions in your business is a great way to build lasting connections among employees, clients and colleagues. Maybe it's a monthly department breakfast to acknowledge top performers. It could be an out-of-office summer activity that brings everyone together. It could be as simple as writing a note to employees on their anniversary about how they have contributed to the company or taking a client to dinner on the anniversary of when they started doing business with you.

Thank you all so much for reading my columns in 2010. I look forward to connecting with you all throughout 2011. Merry Christmas.

Maureen O'Grady Condon, a Framingham resident, is principal of Precision Marketing Group, a marketing firm that serves entrepreneurial, B2B companies. Contact her at Maureen@precisionmarketinggroup.com.