

TOP 5 TIPS FOR YEAR-END BONUS PLANNING



If you've already thought about how to spend your bonus check, think again. The big year-end bonus is history. Even if your employer can still afford some kind of bonus, it's probably a lot smaller than last year—and it might not even be green. But don't panic. Here are five lessons in year-end financial etiquette that should keep the jolly in your holiday!

Lesson 1: Don't Count Your Bonus Check Until It's Cash

If you're already in debt from spending money that will never arrive, you've just learned a very expensive lesson. So how will you get through the holiday gift-giving season now that you've spent all your money? Think creatively. Make your gifts this year, or donate your time by volunteering. And try to pay off your pre-bonus debts as quickly as possible in the new year.

Lesson 2: Keep a Low Profile

Deeply disappointed by the lack of a bonus check? Don't forget your good fortune to be employed in this economy. Grumble to your family and friends—not your boss or co-workers. Take a look around. You'll probably find some non-cash perks like extra time off, free lunch, holiday parties, a prime parking spot, or an opportunity to negotiate a better job title. Take advantage of these perks. And remember: there's a lot more to job satisfaction than extra cash.

Lesson 3: Leave the Lampshade at Home

Don't pass up the invitation to your company's holiday party. But remember that it's a business function. Don't enjoy yourself too much or blow off too much steam this year—or face the consequences the morning afterward. Holiday parties are not the place to mouth off about your boss or to engage in inappropriate behavior.

Lesson 4: Make a List and Check It Twice

If this non-bonus year has made you think twice about staying with your current employer, make a list of reasons to launch a full-scale job search. If the non-bonus is the only thing on your list, consider staying put. But if your list is longer than your arm, dust off that resume and get yourself out there. Networking at holiday parties is a great way to start.

Lesson 5: Have Fun the Old-Fashioned Way

Even if you work for Ebenezer Scrooge, your holidays don't have to be gloomy. Keep money in its proper perspective. Spend time with people you care about. Be thankful for all the good things that have happened to you this year. Do something nice for someone in need. Plan for a successful new year. And be of good cheer this holiday season!

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