



Behind the Holiday Glow: Employees Feel Gift-Giving Pressure, and Nearly Half Say It Hurts Their Wallet

This holiday season, generosity may come with strings attached

TORONTO, Dec. 10, 2025 — As festive lights go up and office parties fill calendars, a new Express Employment Professionals-Harris Poll survey reveals a surprising truth: while workplace celebrations and gift exchanges are widespread, many employees feel more pressured than joyful when it comes to giving.

Nearly all Canadian hiring managers (91%) say their company hosts celebrations, most commonly for holidays (51%), birthdays (49%), retirements (46%) and work anniversaries (43%). And nearly half (47%) report that employees regularly exchange gifts. But beneath the surface of these cheerful traditions lies a growing sense of obligation.



Gift-Giving Pressure in the Workplace

From interns to executives, no one seems exempt from the unwritten rules of workplace gift-giving. More than half of hiring managers say their employees feel compelled to give gifts to:

- Direct Reports: 47%
- Peers, Managers/Supervisors, Senior Leadership: 46%

Notably, almost one-third (31%) say their employees feel a lot of, or extreme, pressure.

Job seekers echo this sentiment. While 85% report their company hosts celebrations and 33% say gift exchanges are common, more than half feel pressured to give gifts to coworkers — especially for birthdays, work anniversaries or holidays.

However, most (60%) say they are comfortable giving gifts to peers for personal occasions.

Younger Workers Feel It More

According to the survey, Gen Z (40%) and millennials (38%) are more likely than Gen X (23%)

and boomers (13%) to say that gift exchanges are common in their workplace.

Gen Z and millennials are also more likely than Gen X to feel extreme pressure to give gifts:

- To managers: 37% and 23% vs. 18%
- To peers: 28% and 28% vs. 11%
- To direct reports: 26% and 26% vs. 14%
- To senior leadership: 28% and 23% vs. 16%

The Financial and Emotional Toll

Most job seekers (73%) say the pressure to give gifts disproportionately affects employees who earn less, and 67% believe it opens the door to favouritism. Additionally, 64% agree these exchanges foster a sense of obligation that can negatively impact team dynamics.

Nearly half (47%) feel pressured to spend a specific amount on gifts, adding financial strain to what should be a season of goodwill.

“Gift giving is never about the item itself. It’s about the relationship,” said Bob Funk Jr., CEO, President and Chairman of Express Employment International. “In any workplace, the real value comes from the exchange of support, time and shared achievements. When expectations around price or participation creep in, it shifts the focus away from what matters. The holidays should strengthen connections, not create pressure or financial strain. The real value is in the relationship.”

Survey Methodology

The Job Insights survey was conducted online within Canada by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals from June 2 to 18, 2025, among 500 Canadian hiring decision-makers.

The Job Seeker Report was conducted online within Canada by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals from June 12 to 27, 2025, among 503 adults ages 18 and older.

For full survey methodology, please contact Ana Curic at Ana@MapleLeafStrategies.com.

If you would like to arrange for an interview to discuss this topic, please contact Ana Curic at (613) 858-2622 or email Ana@MapleLeafStrategies.com.

About Robert (Bob) Funk Jr.

Robert (Bob) Funk Jr., is the Chief Executive Officer, President and Chairman of Express Employment International, a global staffing franchisor founded and headquartered in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He leads a portfolio of workforce solution brands, including the

flagship Express Employment Professionals franchise, along with several affiliated brands serving specialized markets. The Express franchise brand is an industry-leading, international staffing company with franchise locations across the U.S., Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

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