

Career lessons from the top 7 Christmas movies of all time...

'Tis the season... that time of year for reflection about the health of our careers. It can be a difficult task, an imponderable. Is my career where I want it to be? A little like that other seasonal tradition of debating the criteria for the best Christmas movies of all time.

We seem eternally intrigued by the Christmas movie debate. Perhaps it's because it gives us an opportunity to challenge our PhD aunts and know-it-all brothers, on a subject that allows latitude to pick holes endlessly.

Well, in that spirit and to offer some food for thought on the more personal subject of career introspection... let us share with you our top 7 festive movies along with the career lessons we can take from them.

Number 7 – *A Christmas Story*

The tale of Ralphie Parker and his exploits to acquire a Red Ryder.

The career parallel here is becoming consumed by material things. A promotion, a pay raise. There are of course good reasons to want financial security, but it can be dangerous to become too single-minded and fall into a trap of confusing means and ends.

Career lesson – be careful not to get sucked into believing a promotion and pay raise will bring you meaning and fulfillment.

Number 6 – Home Alone

The McCallister family leave eight-year-old Kevin at home as they fly to Paris on vacation.

Have you ever doubted your ability to take on a new challenge? We live in a strange world where we are simultaneously encouraged to stretch for the stars but reminded of the ignominy of failure. And we must all admit to occasionally being victim of imposter syndrome.

Career lesson – don't doubt your capacity to make big career leaps. You are often at your best when you stretch for something that initially feels slightly out of reach.

Number 5 – Bad Santa

Billy Bob Thornton in an 'anti-Christmas' movie.

It explores the depths we can plunge into when we are without purpose. The classic hero's journey but with an emphasis on personal despair and hopelessness.

Career lesson – Without an overarching purpose it is easy to lose yourself. Think deeply about what you are prepared to fight for and use it as an anchor.

Number 4 – Elf

The story of finding your place in the world. Of the difficult and sometimes perilous journey to understand who you really are. We see parallels here in the big life transitions we make, like from student/child to independent professional.

Career lesson – Don't shy away from confronting the big changes in your career. Understand we all sometimes feel reluctant to take on the necessary challenges. But the choice is to go forward and grow... or go backwards and stagnate.

Number 3 – Gremlins

The story of Jekyll and Hyde cute furry animals.

A cautionary tale about heeding advice and understanding the risks. We see the allegory in careers to moral jeopardy. We go through our careers often believing that moral dilemmas announce themselves. The reality is that some of the toughest challenges we face are the insidious invitations to cut a corner.

Career lesson – Be vigilant for the subtle but seductive temptations of deviating from your moral code. Be particularly wary of people in expensive suits saying, ‘it’s ok... everyone else is doing it.’

Number 2 – Die Hard

Yippee Ki-Yay.... Of course, this is a Christmas movie!

We could look at John McLane’s exploits as an example of purpose, passion, and link that to how we are at our best at work when we focus on a compelling mission. However, there is also something less obvious... John McLane is effective despite having no legitimate power. He is more than a match for the baddies even though he does not lead an army, lay claim to a throne, or front a secret society of spies.

Career lesson – Don’t limit yourself by your grade, job title, or reporting line... you can have a huge impact depending on how you choose to frame the challenges and possibilities.

Number 1 – Dickens a Christmas Carol

A Christmas Carol fits an idealised version of moral redemption, the power of the human spirit, and celebrates the victory of light over darkness. In many ways, our careers present the very same challenges to us.

Career lesson – The challenges of navigating a successful career largely lie with our abilities to separate the immediate necessities of our jobs with what we find authentically the most fulfilling life pursuits. Knowing what we are really fighting for is the key.

Now let the debate begin. Do you agree with our movie list? Do you agree with the lessons we have chosen to highlight? Do any of these apply to where you are in your careers this Christmas? Whether this article has provided you with food for personal reflection, inspired you to debate our choices, or just made

you smile for a few minutes, we hope you have a wonderful festive season.

Dr Helmut Schuster and Dr David Oxley are career experts and co-authors of *A Career Carol: A Tale of Professional Nightmares and How to Navigate Them.*

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