

Guidelines For a Safe and Appropriate Holiday Party

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It is the holiday season! And, with companies now getting together for the holiday parties again, it is timely to remind you of some important party behaviors.

Although almost everyone likes a good office party or a “get-to-together”, these social events can result in legal traps for the unwary.

What are the holiday party risks, and how do we effectively manage them?

The Providing and the Consumption of Alcoholic Beverages

The use of alcohol can make a person happy and at ease in social environments. In moderation, there are generally no problems. But, when alcohol is imbibed at an improper rate, inebriation and potentially irresponsible (or even) irrational behavior can, and usually will, result.

Before planning or hosting an office party, think about utilizing these precautions:

1. Hire a licensed server/bartender. Although it may cost you a little more than an open bar, or having another employee acting as a server, it can save you a lot. Experienced servers can better identify when a person is becoming intoxicated. In such a situation, the server, as an objective third party, can cut-off the employee and can do so without it becoming an uncomfortable and personal manager-to-employee or employee-to-employee scenario.
2. Limit: the number of drinks permitted (perhaps using drink tickets); the type of drinks permitted (also provide sodas, water, and other non-alcoholic beverages); and the time that alcoholic beverages are being served (“last call”).
3. Serve appropriate food items, and make sure they are readily available before, during, and after the time in which alcoholic beverages are served. The food can slow down the consumption of drinks and can aid in the bodily absorption of alcohol.
4. Offer pre-paid Uber/Lyft/taxi rides or the availability of certain employees to act as designated drivers.

Appropriate Dress Code

No matter the time, location, or occasion for the party, make sure employees are aware of your dress code expectations, and that inappropriate and overly suggestive attire is not acceptable for [any office-related function](#).

Respect Individual Preferences

The point of the holiday party should be to celebrate and reward employees who want the celebration and reward. Reasons some employees may choose to avoid the office holiday party may include having suffered a personal loss at this time of year, general discomfort with mixing “business with pleasure,” religious beliefs, another commitment that evening, or simply preferring to spend the time with family. And, some employees may still be wary of associating socially in this COVID prevalent environment. In any case, employers must never retaliate or ostracize those uncomfortable with office parties, no matter their reason.

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Adhere to Policies and Protocols (and Create Them If Needed)

Office policies and protocols apply regardless of where office personnel congregate, onsite or offsite. These policies are so important they’re worth repeating verbatim to employees. HR professionals should consider the following:

- Make sure you have comprehensive, lawful workplace policies (harassment, discrimination, retaliation, complaint process, social media) in place.
- Circulate a memo to employees prior to your holiday party reminding them of your workplace policies, that those policies apply equally to on- and off-premises parties, and that the company will not tolerate inappropriate behavior and violations of its policies.

Have a great Holiday Season!

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