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10 Tips to Survive the Office Holiday Party and Avoid an HR Hangover

Particularly in view of the media headlines this year, the annual holiday party is an event that is raising concern for management in every type of business. Here are some tips to make sure that your holiday party remains festive and a positive way of building goodwill among your employees — and not a trigger for bad behavior or employee complaints or claims.

1. **Remember that this is first and foremost a work event** — and tactfully communicate this message to all employees. Be sure that no uninvited guests attend.
2. **The party should be attended by employees at all levels** Confirm that senior managers and the company’s HR executives will be there (even if it’s for only part of the evening).
3. **Have senior management circulate.** It’s good for morale for them to speak with as many employees as possible — and it reinforces a certain standard of behavior in all parts of the party room.
4. **Focus the party on networking and team building, rather than drinking and dancing.** If possible, use music for festive “background noise” only (particularly if this is an employee-only event).
5. **If you are serving alcohol, consider limiting to beer, wine and perhaps a single festive cocktail.** Make sure the venue or caterer complies with applicable safe-service laws or guidance and that there is sufficient food at the event. (Even a party with a strict budget can include sandwiches or pizzas for hungry employees.)
6. **Have a “last call” for drinks at least a half-hour before the close of the event.** And, keep the coffee and tea flowing until the end.
7. **Designate two or three HR executives or other managers to stay to the end of the event.** Make sure that they have cab vouchers or the company’s ride-sharing account information, which they can use to send any intoxicated employees home.
8. **If the event is at a hotel, speak to the front desk** — no one from the party should be reserving “party” rooms for after the event.
9. **Don’t host an after party.** While you may not be able to stop employees from continuing the festivities after the official event, it should not be an “after party” organized or funded by your company.

10. If there are post-party issues raised by any employees, deal with them promptly and respectfully. Even if you question an employee’s judgment, remember that this situation occurred at a company-sponsored event. Be sure to look into any employee concern or complaint in accordance with your company’s usual policies against discrimination and harassment.

If we can provide further guidance or advice for a specific situation, please let us know. Best wishes for a happy, healthy — and uneventful — holiday season.



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