

## 7 Tips for Saving the Holiday Party (and an HR nightmare)

**12/6/2013** – Holiday parties are a tradition at this time of year, but they can create a hangover that lasts all year round. What starts out as a simple plan to get employees together to celebrate can all too easily end up in the copier being used in very inappropriate ways.

Best intentions aside, not all companies come out of their holiday parties unscathed. Some end up paying for mistakes made at this time of year for a long, long time and others have sworn off parties altogether fearing liability issues.

Don't let fear deter you from getting your employees together. Take some time beforehand to make sure you're not making one of these seven mistakes that can quickly turn your holiday party in to a disaster.

1. Holidays are for giving, not making: Don't make the gathering mandatory. Requiring attendance can make employees angry, and it can still be deemed work-related. Make attendance optional, but stress decorum is mandatory.
2. Think about making it a family affair. If possible, logistically and monetarily try to include significant others and family. This will help you build a sense of community and keep people on their best behavior. Um... yes dear, I've had enough of the eggnog.
3. Get out, get out, get out! Try to avoid having your party at the office, and during work hours. Separate work from play a bit. Have your gathering away from the office and during non-working hours so that staff members identify the time with leisure.
4. Sensitivity is key. Select a location for your party that caters to all. Don't choose a venue that is specific to a religion, political affiliation, or lifestyle choice. You're safer picking a neutral venue rather than one that could make an employee uncomfortable. Activities that appeal to a variety of interests makes sure no one feels left out or unfairly targeted (and don't forget about vegetarian and vegan employees!).
5. Libations or no libations. If you plan to serve the adult beverages, have a plan in place to deal with employees discretely, but directly. If you do decide to serve alcohol, perhaps think about limiting the open bar to the pre-meal time.
6. We don't live in a bubble. You may have heard of the little things known as You Tube and Facebook. Remember, everyone needs to face everyone on Monday morning. Send a memo out before the party: "Always remember you are a company representative, even at the holiday party. Don't do anything you don't want to haunt you afterwards."
7. Be vigilant and smart. Don't Ignore inappropriate behavior or issues because you think people just need to lighten up. Arms draped around shoulders and off-color comments can be interpreted THOUSANDS of ways. Harassment is real, and can come back to bite you if you ignore it, even in a social setting. Be sure to pay attention to inappropriateness and address it promptly.

The holidays are a time to relax and let loose a bit. Employers like to take the time to celebrate and to thank the employees who have worked hard for them all year. With a little planning and thought, these gatherings can be all that they were intended, and can leave you feeling better connected and ready to start the New Year strong.

For additional information on this or any other Human Resources topic, consult the staff at McCloskey Partners today! We can help your small business thrive.

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