

HR INSIGHTS

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5 Holiday Party Best Practices

Workplace-sponsored holiday parties present a host of liabilities for organizations each year. Factors like choice of venue and employees' religious affiliations can create friction even before alcohol is thrown into the mix. Below are some best practices for hosting a successful holiday party.

1. Update Your Employee Handbook

Prior to the event, make sure your employee handbook is up to date regarding applicable holiday party topics, including the following:

- Outlining anti-harassment policies
- Enforcing a dress code
- Forbidding alcohol consumption while conducting business
- Expressing consequences for inappropriate behavior, like overt drunkenness

2. Make it Optional

Generally, if a workplace function is mandatory, employees must be compensated for their time. Depending on the number of employees, enforcing and tracking attendance may be difficult. With this in mind, it can simply be easier to make the party optional.

3. Keep it Festive

There are many arguments concerning the appropriateness of observing one holiday over another. For instance, some workplaces may favor a "Christmas party" over a more inclusive celebration. However, focusing on the holiday spirit—and avoiding religious celebrations—can help avoid unwanted employee divisions or discrimination suits.

4. Control or Limit Alcohol

Many organizations offer alcohol at holiday parties, but that comes with additional risks. Consider some of the following methods to help control employee consumption:

- Offer drink tickets (with a maximum limit)
- Charge for drinks
- Only offer lower-alcohol drinks, like beer, wine or hard cider

5. Designate a Monitor

If you decide to offer alcohol, make sure there is a company-designated person to flag inappropriate behavior and ensure everyone leaves the party safely.

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