

## **21 Tips to make it your best Christmas Party Ever!**

### **1. Do you have a Policy for Parties?**

You should be aware that a Christmas party is classed as a 'work activity'. It therefore should be treated as such by having guidelines in place. This could be as simple as displaying employees' responsibilities, such as acceptable standards of behavior, on a notice board. The employer's responsibilities, for instance meeting health & safety requirements and providing grievance procedures to deal with any resulting problems, should also be outlined. This covers you by showing that you laid down standards (albeit different ones from normal) that you expect staff to abide by.

### **2. Mind the Gap...**

Just as with any other work-related activity, a simple risk assessment should be carried out to identify potential hazards. This could involve inspecting the venue to plan for drunken slips and trips, considering the safety of people going home after the event, and even identifying any potential conflict between employees so that table plans can be organised accordingly. Often staff use the annual party to vent their normally pent up emotions and inter departmental issues – especially after one too many bottles of wine.

### **3. Set the standards**

These standards of behavior should be included in the 'Party Policy' and should clarify unacceptable behavior, such as harassment, bullying and fighting. Employees should understand that, as this is technically a work activity, normal disciplinary procedures would be applied. This needs to be made clear to everybody prior to the event.

### **4. Take care when inviting husbands and wives**

If inviting employees' partners to the event, employers need to tread carefully. This should not be restricted to husbands and wives but also extended to partners of the opposite and same sex, to avoid potential sexual orientation discrimination claims. With the introduction of the Civil Partnerships Act same-sex couples have the right to enter into an equivalent of marriage, employers should make extra sure that, if inviting partners, same-sex partners are not excluded from festivities. Otherwise you risk accusations of discrimination.

### **5. You're still the boss, even if it's a party.**

You may want to enjoy yourself but drinking too much at the Christmas bash can be dangerous. Avoid discussing promotion, career prospects or salary rises with employees who may use the convivial situation to discuss matters that are more suited to a formal appraisal or private meeting. The employee is likely to expect any career promises to be kept - even if the employer can't remember the conversation. Some staff may even take advantage of your worse for wear situation to make up claims for what was discussed.

### **6. Keep a lid on the Christmas spirit**

If you as the employer supplies the alcohol, or encourages its consumption, you may be legally responsible for the welfare of the employee if they suffer from drink induced disasters - even if they occur outside of the party itself. The best solution is to limit the number of free drinks or put a limited amount behind the bar and be prepared to ask individuals to take it easy if they appear worse for wear.

### **7. Food fight**

If you are providing a buffet, the food must be safe to eat. Buffets present a particularly high risk of food poisoning from foods such as cooked meats, eggs, mayonnaise and cooked rice. Food should not be left out at room temperature for more than 90 minutes and should be stored below 5°C.

### **8. Love is in the air?**

The Christmas party is the perfect environment for a festive fling but this could have repercussions when employees return to work. A brief encounter under the mistletoe can cause embarrassment in the workplace and put strain on working relationships. While many businesses have informal views on office affairs, most do not have a policy on workplace relationships. Employers should make sure all employees are informed of the company's view on romantic affairs between colleagues and reminded of this ahead of the party. There have been many documented cases of staff leaving their jobs because of party antics that got out of hand.

### **9. Taxi!**

As employers are responsible for employees' actions after consuming alcohol they have provided, sensible bosses will issue advice before the party about not driving after having an alcoholic drink. It is advisable to hire a minibus for the end of the night, or provide the numbers of local taxi firms to demonstrate that reasonable steps have been taken to minimise this risk.

### **10. The morning After**

A contract exists between the employee and employer that they will be in a fit state to carry out the work they are being paid to do. Bosses should decide to what extent they will be lenient to staff coming to work with a hangover, arriving late, or even not at all, and inform employees. More important is the safety of employees, who may not be fully sober the next day, especially if they need to drive or operate machinery. Employers should either advise employees beforehand not to drink too much alcohol, or remove the risk to safety by giving them alternative work until they are fit to resume their normal tasks. The best way to avoid this is if you can hold your party on a Friday or Saturday night so that everybody can enjoy themselves without facing an early start the next day.

**Being responsible for the office Christmas party can be very stressful. Colleagues will be expecting you to provide the perfect event; as will your boss, but at the best possible price. And it all has to be organised whilst managing your usual heavy workload.**

**Here are a few tips to help keep the run up to Christmas stress free:**

### **11. Book Early for Christmas**

Only attempt to ask around for dates if your office or department has fewer than 20 people. Any number above that and you'll never get an agreement. Just set a date and inform everyone. The best way to get a high turn out is to give everybody plenty of notice – ideally 4 months. Don't inform people unless you have confirmed the venue.

### **12. Keep it regular.**

Many companies find it best to set an annual rule for the Christmas Party. For example it's always the first Saturday in December or the last working Tuesday before Christmas. If you decide on a rule and stick to it, people will know not to book in anything else on that 'special' day.

### **13. Time to get out**

It's always best to have your event at a venue rather than in the office. Staff feel more valued if they are taken out, plus you don't have to worry about office health and safety issues, not to mention the mess the next day.

### **14. To share or not**

Decide whether you want to take over a venue for a private party or attend a shared party. For easy organisation find a venue that will provide entertainment too. If you just book a restaurant find out how many sittings they have per evening otherwise you could find yourself being rushed to finish making way for the next guests. Don't forget to ask about dress code and what time the party will have to finish.

### **15. Make it easy**

Choose a venue that is central for everyone and close to transport links so that the journey home for people is as easy and safe as possible. If it's not, provide transport back to the office as a central point. Line-up taxis beforehand. Everyone else wants a taxi at this time of year.

### **16. The food & drink programme**

Do provide food and not just drink! As most problems occur due to excess alcohol, be aware that your company may be held responsible for the actions of staff at parties.

Providing food doesn't have to be expensive. Most venues have a set Christmas menu selection and a range of budgets. If the party is in the office, party platters from good sandwich companies or supermarkets are very cost effective.

### **17. One glass limit**

Decide on a drinks policy beforehand. Will the company pay for a welcome drink or the first few drinks only, the whole lot or nothing at all? Make sure staff know well in advance what drinks will or won't be provided. Also remember to provide soft drinks for the drivers. Or don't forget to arrange transport or remind attendees to arrange transport so no-one is responsible for driving after consuming alcohol.

### **18. Guest list and invitations:**

If you're organising a very large party or inviting guests from outside the company, a formal invitation is required. If not, an all-staff email will suffice. Follow up with reminders a week before and two days before the event.

### **19. Count on us**

Make sure you include an RSVP and menu confirmation deadline. Give people an email reminder a day before the deadline to cut down on chasing staff. Let client or customer facing staff such as reception and customer care know well in advance if they have to organise cover for their jobs so they can attend the party and which department will cover the cost!

### **20. Build it Up and Make it Fun:**

Every company has its scrooges so try and create some extra interest as you approach the Christmas party date. Organise a Secret Santa, set a theme and ask people to come in fancy dress or run an award on the night for the best dressed or most festive looking person. Put disposable cameras on the tables and get them developed the next day and up on the notice board or company intranet.

### **21. Leave it to the professionals**

Sounds like hard work? If all of this sounds like too much to do and that you would rather have your staff making money for the company and taking care of business rather than ringing around to order party hats there is an alternative. Passing the project over to an experienced events organiser has many advantages. You are more likely to have a successful event on your hands is just one of the advantages. They also take most of their entire fee from the venue, the entertainers, the caterers etc, This means that you get to keep your staff working and your event is organised by somebody who really knows what they are doing. Perhaps more importantly they'll reduce the chances of you getting sued because they know the way to organise the event so that it's fun and memorable for all the right reasons.

Contact Elaine on 0116 240 2330 to find out more about how to make your Christmas event one

of the Hi 2 Events of the year. For more information see [www.hi2events.co.uk](http://www.hi2events.co.uk)