

Holiday Party Planning: Avoiding Employee Misconduct at Your Year-End Celebration

Article By:

Kelly R. Rourke

With 2011 coming to a close, companies are making plans for their annual year-end parties. Many companies will host a “traditional” drinks and dinner holiday party, treating the party as a way to build community, say “thank you” for the year’s work, and show confidence in the year ahead. Other companies will take a “nontraditional” approach to their annual holiday celebrations and recognize their employees in a different way. Examples include holding a lunchtime potluck meal, with a recipe exchange; donating the money that would have been spent on a party to an employee-selected charity; taking a few hours to do a team community event, such as volunteering at a food bank; or gifting extra Paid Time Off or vacation hours to employees for use next year.

However you choose to celebrate the end of the year with your employees, it is important to remember the following “Holiday Event Legal Tips”:

Conduct

- Normal work rules and standards of conduct apply to the holiday event, even if it is held off site. Remind your managers and other employees of considerations such as appropriate dress, appropriate language and appropriate conduct. What happens at the holiday event does not stay at the holiday event.
- Lead by example. Managers and executives set the tone for the event.
- Respond to inappropriate behavior. Someone must act as Party Police.

Alcohol

- Alcohol is the biggest culprit. Taking employees out of their usual working environment and funding their alcohol consumption can lead to complications and discomfort that go well beyond a hangover. Consider the following:
- If you are serving alcohol, provide ample food and entertainment to make sure that drinking

does not become the focus of the event.

- Consider limiting free alcohol consumption; give everyone only a couple of drink tickets, with the option of a cash bar to follow.
- Do not serve punches or other drinks in which the drinker cannot gauge the alcohol level.
- Provide alternate transportation in case anyone needs it at the end of the evening.

Other

- Skip the mistletoe! The holidays are no excuse for encouraging your employees to kiss each other in the workplace.
- No mandatory attendance. Designate the event as strictly social and make attendance voluntary.
- Everyone is welcome. Make your holiday celebration an inclusive, non-denominational event to avoid allegations of religious discrimination.

Regardless of how you choose to celebrate the holidays with your employees, remember that employment laws do not take a day off, and unwanted guests including harassment and discrimination may join you for your celebration if you do not keep the event under control.

©2025 MICHAEL BEST & FRIEDRICH LLP

National Law Review, Volume I, Number 333

Source URL: <https://natlawreview.com/article/holiday-party-planning-avoiding-employee-misconduct-your-year-end-celebration>