

Decorating for the Holidays – Ask The Expert



Even though the holiday season is well behind us, it is always good to be prepared for future office celebrations.

Make sure you respect all observances and help employees feel included during holiday festivities at your workplace.

QUESTION

We have a couple of employees who for religious reasons do not celebrate Christmas. This is their first year with our company. Will it offend them if we decorate the offices for Christmas as we usually do, or would it be disrespectful to ask them?

ANSWER

Decorating the office for Christmas is not inherently offensive, even to employees who do not celebrate that specific holiday, but it is very easy to make decorations secular and inclusive. Also, it is appropriate to ask them how they feel about celebrations and decorations, but how you ask matters.

EXPLANATION

In many workplaces, employers opt for decorations that are festive but not designated to a specific holiday, such as trees/seasonal flora like poinsettia or holly, winter lights, garlands, snowflake ornaments or paper decorations, signage that says "Happy Holidays", and pictures/paintings of winter scenes. It is very easy to decorate while avoiding exclusively religious symbols like nativity scenes.

If you host holiday activities, try to make them inclusive and optional – no one should feel pressured to participate. There are ways you can communicate that you want to include these employees in holiday festivities without causing discomfort or obligation on their behalf. Here's a script you can use:

"We usually decorate the office in December with secular Christmas and winter decorations. We want to make sure our space feels comfortable and inclusive for everyone. Is there anything we should keep in mind or avoid to ensure you feel included?"