

Festive Celebrations And The Workplace



With the holiday season in full swing, employers are in the midst of the annual balancing act between festive celebration and appropriate workplace conduct. As the saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Here are some tips for planning and hosting a successful and (hopefully) incident free workplace holiday party.

1. Alcohol Consumption

Many holiday parties involve the provision of alcohol to employees. In an effort to prevent over-consumption, consider (i) setting a fixed period of time where alcoholic beverages will be served; (ii) providing a controlled number of drink tickets per guest; (iii) hiring an independent bartender who has experience and training to identify, prevent and address over-consumption; (iv) having designated sober employees who can monitor to ensure that everyone is consuming alcohol safely, and (v) serving food and non-alcoholic beverage options.

2. Location & Transportation

Consider holding the party offsite and plan ahead to ensure safe transportation options for employees and guests when they leave the event, such as (i) the pre-arrangement of designated drivers, (ii) the provision of taxi-cabs or (iii) the hiring of a local transportation company. Make sure that transportation options and expectations regarding the use of personal vehicles (i.e. that employees don't drive home) are well-communicated in advance of and during the event, including by having someone at the door of the venue as employees leave to ensure that they are making good decisions regarding transportation.

3. Prevention of Discrimination

Given the diversity of our workplaces, ensure that holiday parties remain non-denominational in nature and provide alternatives to the consumption of alcoholic beverages to ensure that the event is not perceived to be (or actually) exclusionary.

Consider also maintaining a work-appropriate dress-code and communicating that expectation to employees in advance of the event.

4. Prevention of Harassment

It is almost inevitable that at events such as holiday parties, there is an increased

risk of inappropriate behaviour. In advance of the event, remind employees of your expectations regarding mutual respect, professional workplace conduct and the treatment of co-workers and guests, including by distributing a copy of your harassment policies and code of conduct in advance of the event. During the course of the event, consider having certain employees responsible for monitoring conduct and identifying problematic behaviour, so that incidents can be addressed quickly, discretely and effectively before they result in harm or embarrassment.

Happy Holidays and all the best to you and your workplace!

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