

# Maintaining Decorum at the Office Holiday Party



*Top holiday blunders and simple strategies to avoid them*

The holiday season is a time of social interaction and a time of stress. The season might bring people together but it can also create opportunities for letting your guard down and making unintended workplace blunders.

## **10 Top Holiday Party Blunders**

What are some of the top workplace holiday associated blunders? In no particular order:

1. Drinking too much and acting inappropriately as a result
2. Dressing inappropriately
3. Gossiping about co-workers or clients
4. Talking negatively about the boss
5. Spilling company secrets or confidential information
6. Complaining about your work, your pay or your co-workers and bosses
7. Flirting with coworkers or their spouses
8. Bringing inappropriate/suggestive gifts for gift exchanges

9. Poor etiquette before, during, and after events
10. Failing to show up for a workplace event

Many of these blunders are tied to alcohol but some will be tied to nerves and the changed atmosphere. Simply being in a more relaxed environment where personal interactions are encouraged can change the dynamics enough to lead to regretful incidents. The setting, music, food, and more creates a social atmosphere not dissimilar to a family gathering. But, make no mistake, it is not a family gathering.

## **Strategies to Reduce Potential Holiday Event Blunders**

1. Maintain a one-drink maximum per hour or do not drink at all. If you think you may drink make an arrangement with a buddy to watch your back. Not only in terms of drinking and driving but also steering you away from conversations or people.
2. Ensure attire matches not only the time and location but also the culture of the organization. Inquire about styles of attire, including casual, formal, semi-dressy. The location and time of day will be useful clues.
3. Before you go identify topics of conversation that are appropriate and those that are not. Discuss current movies, sporting events, holiday planning, general family updates, even professional topics but avoid talking about work. Think of strategies to allow you to get out of conversations headed into the danger zone.
4. If you have been eyeing someone as a potential romantic interest the holiday party is not the place to make this move. You may even choose to avoid being alone with this person at a holiday event.
5. Unless you hear otherwise select safe and neutral gifts for gift exchanges. Items can include:
  - Food, sparkling drinks, specialty teas, coffees, hot chocolate and wine; although not every one will drink wine it would be considered an appropriate gift; food could include seasonal chocolates or baked goods
  - Coffee shop gift cards such as Tim Horton's and Starbucks (but to make the gift more thoughtful place the card inside a chocolate filled glass jar or something else creative)
  - Household practical and fun ideas such as holiday themed kitchen items, a cookie jar, specialty soaps, lotions, fragrance makers such as potpourri, candles, incense
6. Remember event etiquette. Seek out, greet and thank your host and ask if there is anything you can do to be of assistance; If the event is at the workplace or someone's home help the host serve or clear food and dishes; sit on chairs, sofa's, stools or the floor and not on tables, desks or other non-seats; look for appropriate places to place your food and drinks
7. Unless circumstances are really beyond your control you need to make every effort to attend. If you cannot attend you need to personally speak to your supervisor and even the company leader and send your regrets. It is better to make an appearance and leave than to hope no one will notice your absence
8. Identify a key mantra you can repeat to yourself to help you remember that you are at a workplace holiday event and not out with personal friends.
9. Be mindful constantly of your surroundings; be aware of who is in a conversation and who is in earshot.

Holiday parties are only a few hours during the year. It can be nice to let your

guard down and socialize. However, the workplace remains the workplace and it is important to remain mindful and aware of your surroundings and in control of your actions the entire time.