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In this Ezine:

**So You Want to Throw Your Employees A Holiday Party
Holidays Can Bring Workday Blues**

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So You Want to Throw Your Employees A Holiday Party

So you want to throw a holiday party for your employees. It's a great gesture and a chance for everyone to get together and have a good time. But holiday parties can also lead to serious problems, many of which relate to the consumption of alcohol: slipping and

falling, unwanted sexual advances, fights between co-workers and car accidents, to name a few. As a result, the well-meaning employer can wake up the next morning with a liability hangover.

However, with proper planning, an employer can reduce the possibility of an incident or accident and potential claims which might be made against it. What follows is a list of ideas for employers to consider in planning a holiday party, designed to reduce the risk of problems and, in some cases, increase the possibility of fun:

- **Have the party outside the workplace.** Employers can be liable for accidents which occur in the workplace on a variety of legal theories. Further, most employers do not have proper facilities for a holiday party. Throwing a party in a hotel, restaurant or other facility designed for these purposes can reduce the risk of injury and shift the responsibility to provide a safe venue to a third party.
- **Plan party-related activities.** A party which offers nothing more than music and alcohol increases the possibility of excess drinking. Activities such as contests, raffles, karaoke, etc., can divert the energies of employees while making the entire event more memorable and entertaining.
- **Restrict alcohol consumption.** First, the employer should consider whether to serve alcohol at all - the choice should not be automatic. If alcohol will be served, the type of alcohol, duration of access and payment for drinks should be considered. Limiting access to alcohol by the time it will be available or the number of drinks which will be served (such as through drink tickets) can reduce the possibility that employees will imbibe to excess.
- **Transportation.** Some types of events, such as sporting events, an out-of-town trip or a harbor cruise, lend themselves to the idea of shared transportation. By requiring that employees travel to and from the event together as, for example, by bus, the possibility of an alcohol-related car accident is minimized.
- **Include food.** Providing food is a good idea for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that food typically slows the absorption of alcohol into the bloodstream. Remember, however, that bar snacks and other types of salty foods are designed to increase thirst and should be avoided at holiday parties.
- **Expand the guest list.** Allowing workers to bring their families and inviting significant clients and other persons with whom the company does business can change the atmosphere of a company party. A party which is more professional or family oriented discourages inappropriate behavior.

- **Train supervisors accordingly.** All employers should encompass discrimination and harassment training as part of their human resource practices. The holiday party should be no exception; supervisors should be reminded that these rules remain in effect and should be instructed to be on the lookout for inappropriate behavior.
- **Pay attention.** Supervisors or other designated personnel should be further instructed to generally keep a watchful eye on the festivities, particularly with respect to alcohol. Are bartenders mixing the drinks too strong? Employees who appear intoxicated should be cut off. More importantly, designated drivers or cabs should be arranged to ensure that such persons have a safe way to get home.
- **Party disclosure/waiver.** A proper disclosure or waiver can reduce the liability exposure to the employer. Such a document should ensure that employees are aware that participation in the event is strictly voluntary. In addition, informing employees that they will be required to act responsibly in arranging for transportation to and from the party and in consuming beverages is a good idea. While this document will not insulate an employer from irresponsible actions, it will, at minimum, serve the purpose of notifying the employees of the employer's expectations with respect to party conduct.

All in all, common sense and a few simple precautions can go a long way toward creating a safe and entertaining holiday atmosphere. Enjoy the holidays!



Holidays Can Bring Workday Blues

The holiday season poses a difficult dilemma: How can you motivate employees during a time of the year considered so synonymous with free time and relaxation?

Between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day there's gifts, shopping, holiday parties, reserved flights and of course eggnog to worry about. Work no longer is the top priority for many employees, and their productivity often suffers.

By being receptive to the inevitability of the holidays, though businesses can maintain—and, in some instances increase—productivity

without negating employee wishes to indulge in the added demands of their personal lives.

People feel stressed about the holidays. If employers can recognize that holidays are stressful with added responsibilities and they can accommodate for that, the happier employees will be, and in turn they'll be grateful and work harder.

One way of accommodating employee wish lists is to address the holidays as early as possible. Waiting until they've begun contributes to stress that could otherwise be avoided. Since the holidays occur predictably each year, businesses may want to consider allotting employee requests for time off on a first-come, first-serve basis. Filing employee requests at the start of the fiscal year is as good as a time as any to begin. Offering a sufficient amount of time off also can help a business to ensure higher levels of productivity.

Employees will find ways to circumvent if they're asked to work harder around the holidays. They'll shop on the internet, page through catalogs or call in sick. If you give people clear time to do holiday stuff, you've then created an explicit contract with them. You can't fight the holidays; you have to accommodate them.

Organizations can be receptive to the holidays without foregoing their business priorities, but it may mean placing extra emphasis on what it is expected on its staff. Managers need to recognize the holidays as a time for family and activities other than business; it's a slower time that brings different needs for different people.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!! FROM OUR FAMILY TO YOURS!

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