



Ten Steps to a Successful Office Party

Decking the halls with boughs of holly for the office party is all very well. But after the event, employers can find it's not always the season to be jolly. Common sense strategies can save you a lot of money and hassle, both at the event itself and afterwards.

How to make sure your office party is a success for everyone before and after the event...

You don't have to be a party pooper to keep on the right side of the law, but as an employer you need to be aware of the potential pitfalls of the annual festive bash. Otherwise you can find yourself facing a number of different grievances and costly claims from employees. Love them or hate them Facebook and Myspace are with us and pictures provide evidence.

Staying informed, taking good advice and putting in place some simple precautionary measures means that everyone can have a safe and enjoyable celebration.

★ Remember that your Christmas party is a work activity

A 'works do' is part of work life, and the same principles apply when it comes to looking after your staff at a posh dinner dance or a night at the local ten pin bowling alley.

★ Make sure food and drink is safe and appropriate

Whether or not you're doing your own catering, be careful with health and safety issues and sensitive to different religious codes, including those surrounding alcohol. Make sure you have a choice of food and drink, so that everyone feels comfortable, valued and respected.

★ Set boundaries

At an event where people can let their hair down, people can also be tempted to let their behaviour slide too. It's how you manage the event that makes the difference. Set out some clear guidelines and make sure everyone is aware of them before the event.

★ Be careful what you promise

A couple of drinks and an informal chat with an employee at a party can easily lead to you promising things you didn't really mean. You may not intend to create something legally binding over a glass of wine, but the employee could certainly understand it that way and call you to account in the future.

Note:

Whilst this fact sheet gives general guidance on the law relating to this topic at the time of drafting, it is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to this area of law. You are advised to seek specific advice in relation to any particular issues that need to be addressed in relation to this topic by a competent person.

Make sure you take an 'inclusive' approach

Discrimination (whether intended or not) on the basis of sexual orientation, race, gender, disability, religion, age or other strongly-held beliefs is a definite no-no. Just one example is if you use an outside venue, make sure the building – and the dance floor – is accessible to wheelchair users. Its details like these that can save or sink your reputation as an employer.

★ Have an observer

Choose one of your managers to act as a discreet 'nanny'. If they observe someone drinking in excess or beginning to harass other staff, the observer can have a quiet word and remind that person of their responsibility to the company and to their fellow employees.

★ Be fair with the logistics

Choose a venue that takes into account how far and wide people live. If budgets permit, you could organise transport and/or accommodation as a goodwill gesture and to reduce the temptation for people to drink and drive. Also, issue staff with details of taxi companies and self-funded accommodation options.

★ Delve into the detail

If you're having a party at your own office premises, spend some time making the space party-safe. Make it difficult for people to put their drinks on top of office equipment and make sure people don't stand on swivel chairs when they're putting up the decorations!

★ Show that you do not condone heavy drinking

Act wisely when it comes to alcohol – and beware of the pitfalls of the free bar! Alcohol-induced fights and other bad behaviour can often be successfully defended at a tribunal once it's known that employer provided the alcohol. Always consider the safety of employees who may not be fully sober the following day, especially if they drive or operate machinery as part of their job.

And finally ... enjoy the event!