

# Have a holly jolly workplace



Bringing holiday cheer to the workplace can be great for morale. To maximize the fun, think about activities before implementing them. Here's a look at how to make some seasonal favorites run smoothly:

## Cubicle decorating

A drab office becomes a winter wonderland when staff members get colorful and creative with their surroundings. Consider awarding prizes to individuals with the best displays or departments with the highest participation rate.

Before asking people to channel their inner Martha Stewart, though, remind everyone to keep things secular and to consider his neighbor. Blinking lights and a motion-activated Santa yelling "Merry Christmas" 50 times a day can turn the nicest co-worker into Scrooge.

## Goodies

Whipping up a batch of their baking best to share promotes camaraderie among employees. Designate an area such as a conference room for the activity. Staff can mingle without disturbing others who are trying to work, and those attempting to watch their weight won't have to pass a plate of shortbread every time they venture from their desk.

## Parties

When The Creative Group asked 400 executives to share how they think employees at their company would most like to celebrate the holidays with colleagues, the top two responses were an off-site party (48%) and an on-site party (21%).

"Hosting an end-of-year party, no matter how simple or extravagant, is a good way for employers to thank staff for their hard work and provide them an opportunity to bond outside of the office," says executive director Diane Domeyer. Her tips for making your fete a success include:

**Asking for input.** Invite employees to suggest a theme or location for the event; they'll have the best handle on the types of activities and venues staff will enjoy most.

**Timing it right.** Weekends in December book up fast for most folks, and location sites might not have availability. Consider scheduling the party in late November or on a weekday during or immediately after work hours to maximize attendance. You can also consider a January event to kick off the new year.

**Keeping it casual.** A group activity, like bowling or volunteering, is not only fun but affordable. And many employees may prefer the more relaxed atmosphere.

**Expressing your appreciation.** Reserve a few minutes during the event to verbally thank employees for their hard work throughout the year. While you don't want to engage in too much 'shop talk,' you should let your team know how valuable they are to you.

## **Secret Santa: pros, cons and compromises**

Perhaps no other holiday workplace ritual draws as many cheers and groans as Secret Santa, the gift-exchange in which a random draw determines the colleague for whom you need to buy a present. Whether you consider it light-hearted fun or a stressful money-waster, you have plenty of company:

"We've been doing Secret Santa for quite a few years now. I find it a really insightful exercise that can show you a lot about your employees. I had an employee at the company who received the same gift three years in a row, which showed me a lot about the relations between the staff. I started arranging more regular staff outings to try and help everyone to get to know each other better, and it worked. The following Secret Santa the employee received a CD that he had really wanted and mentioned in a conversation a few months ago—a detail that would only be picked up by someone taking an interest in the life of a fellow employee."

-- Max Robinson, *Ace Work Gear*

"The main reason we don't participate in Secret Santa is because we've found that it doesn't necessarily fall in line with our internal goal of promoting a positive work environment and inspiring employee morale. It might sound silly to attribute hazards to something as flimsy as Secret Santa, but we've found that Secret Santa is usually not something that inspires our company to be genuine and thoughtful. When somebody is more or less forced to buy another person a gift, there's little room for that exchange to be positive. There's also something about the deliberation process leading up to the exchange. People seem on edge when having to think about Secret Santa for a few weeks. It causes a strange feeling in the office."

-- Jake Tully, *TruckDrivingJobs.com*

Some companies have found success by tweaking the activity. SD Equity Partners gives each employee \$30 to spend on his or her randomly selected colleague. "Secret Santa is an excellent workplace project to build camaraderie and enjoy the holiday season," says co-founder Evan Harris. "However, we found that forcing people to make a purchase out of their own pockets for a co-worker they may not know too well can seem a little unfair. This method takes away the financial burden of Secret Santa and allows for much more creativity and fun."