

Humbug! Why more employers say no to the office holiday party



The season for merriment is here. While workplace holiday parties are perfectly acceptable when it comes to business etiquette and protocol, this year only 65% of companies plan to hold a holiday party. That's the lowest number since 2009, when 62% of companies held holiday festivities, according to recent survey findings by outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas.

The survey of HR executives found that 27% said they had decided not to hold a party this year. That is the highest percentage since 2009, when 38% reported they would not hold year-end celebrations.

"The low number of corporate celebrations does not appear to be due to economic reasons. Companies are sitting on tax savings and generally report a thriving economy," says Challenger, Gray & Christmas VP Andrew Challenger.

Sixty-two percent of companies said, for them, the economy has improved over last year.

"The number could be due to several factors, including potential liability following the #MeToo movement," Challenger speculated.

In fact, of those companies that are having a party this year, nearly 58% reported they have addressed the harassment with their staff this year, 33% of which have addressed or will address this issue prior to the party.

Challenger said, "Other reasons for fewer holiday parties could include that a company's workforce is primarily remote and it's too difficult to gather for a holiday party, or perhaps companies are having parties at other times of the year."

Celebrate smart this year

If you are among the companies that have decided to host a company party this year, keep these tips in mind to make sure it's going to be a fun event that still keeps office etiquette a priority.

- **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.
- **Know your audience.** If you're going to a comedy show or play, be sure to research the content to ensure it doesn't contain anything attendees might find offensive.
- **Set limits.** Don't be afraid to offer a cash bar or establish a drink limit, and consider making taxis available.
- **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.

Other ways to spread the cheer

Forgoing the holiday party? There are other ways to celebrate the season. 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.

However you decide to celebrate, make sure you take a minute to thank your team for their hard work.