



Ideas and Information for Human Resources Professionals

## EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

### The Holiday Liability

Some employees may dread the office holiday party, some may look forward to it, but it's almost a given that the company's HR department holds its collective breath every year until the next morning. That's because an office holiday party can be a huge liability. According to an article on the website of the *Society for Human Resource Management* titled, "[How to Survive Your Office Holiday Party](#)," three out of four companies will have holiday parties in December.



Musician Andrew W.K. says, "When it's time to party, we will party hard!" and that's probably the same line of thinking for some employees when it comes to the office holiday party. It may be difficult not to overindulge when there's usually free food, free booze, and happy co-workers in a non-work environment, but the standard day-to-day work rules still apply.

There's no reason not to have fun, but employees should be aware of their limits when it comes to alcohol and to remember to be on their best behavior because someone is always watching (and reporting). In this day and age of readily-accessible video cameras via smartphones, an employee's huge faux pas can be documented at the touch of a button, then posted on social media for all to see forever. And that's if the employee committing the gaffe is lucky. If he or she is unlucky, their recorded bad behavior could be reviewed with them the next day with HR and a supervisor.

An article on the *Workforce* website titled, "[7 Tips to Avoid the Holiday Party Nightmare](#)," shares an extreme case of wrongdoing at a holiday party along with a few tips in order to keep everything under control. That same *Society for Human Resource Management* article doubles



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down on these tips and reinforces that office holiday parties can still be fun while limiting bad behavior and reducing risk.

One of the most important of these tips is to remind everyone about the company's harassment rules or to even hold a brief company-wide meeting before the party to instill these rules. Other tips are common sense such as reviewing the company's insurance policy on parties, closing the bar early, and scheduling the party during the work week rather than on a Friday or Saturday night. Party games should be avoided as they can require physical contact or the sharing of personal information. When it comes to alcohol, employees should be reminded to drink responsibly and management should tell the bartenders not to pour strong drinks and definitely not serve anyone who appears drunk or underage. Issuing drink tickets can also help limit the amount of alcohol consumed. Companies can go the extra mile by providing transportation, or even a hotel room, for employees who had too much to drink. To help corral bad behavior, or if a company just wants to be extra cautious, then spouses should be invited as they often tend to ensure their significant other doesn't do anything he or she might regret. Companies can also designate a manager or two to "chaperone" and monitor the party.

When all is said and done, what is the general employee culture at your company? This typically sets the tone for the annual holiday party. Is it insanity and hangovers, mind-numbingly boring, or somewhere in-between?

## TECHNOLOGY

### Videos Make Everything Better

You don't need to look at the success of YouTube to realize that people are naturally drawn to online videos. The same can be said when people are looking for a job. In an article titled, "[Job Seekers Find Job Postings with Video More Compelling](#)," on the website of the *Society for Human Resource Management*, it notes that if a video is short and to the point, then people will look at a job posting twice as long as for a posting without video and they will share that posting four times as much. One of the potential reasons for this is because a video can convey the culture and character of a company far more than the standard boilerplate job wording can.



Once a potential job candidate views the hiring team, gets a feel for the open position, and if it generates interest, then he or she can quickly determine whether it's a good fit without wading through the standard recruiting text. Plus, in a video the person being shown can talk directly to the job candidate and show him or her the office setting, their team or co-workers, and the benefits and opportunities.

Keeping the video short and simple is a no-brainer if you want to ensure the job seeker stays engaged. Shooting the video with a smartphone or tablet and keeping the duration to 30 seconds or less is

## IN BRIEF

### Hearing Damage Is Ear-Reversible

If someone asks you what's the most common injury at work, what's the first thing that comes to mind? I'd be willing to bet that it wasn't hearing loss, yet according to an article on *USA Today's* website titled, "[Shhh! America's most common workplace injury is hearing loss](#)," the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) say that's exactly what it is. As one would expect, people who work in the mining, construction, and manufacturing industries are the most at risk.

Hearing loss can be accompanied by pain, pressure, ringing in the ears, and a heightened sensitivity to noise. And unfortunately, hearing loss is irreversible, which makes safeguarding a person's hearing all the more important.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) noise limit for workers who are exposed for eight hours each days is 90 decibels. However, that doesn't account for exposure to noise outside of the workday. Many noisy places such as restaurants and sporting venues add to a person's collective danger for hearing loss.

One of the main issues appears to be a lack of employee awareness and education. Many employees may not know that the noise level is high enough to cause damage. This is especially the case when the level is moderate, yet continual throughout the day versus a high noise level that many people can instantly recognize as being hazardous.

Installing noise barriers, or replacing noisy machines and tools with quieter versions is often too costly for employers, so they just rely on their employees to wear hearing protection. This can, unfortunately, lead to the employee simply taking

a must. Also, don't wait until everyone leaves the office, or before everyone gets there, to take the video. Job candidates need to see and hear the noise, energy, and day-to-day activities that they will be immersed in if they apply. Making the environment seem cold and sterile does a disservice to the person seeking a job since it's not an accurate depiction of the working conditions. Remember that it's better to strive for authenticity, not perfection. This isn't a Hollywood movie. Similarly, it's best not to use actors or scripts. Let your employees be open to talking freely.

Finally, make sure you have an approval process in place before any video goes live. These videos represent the company and you don't want them convey a negative feeling or have any type of miscommunication. You also don't want all your company's videos to look or sound alike. Variety will help attract all sorts of people and expand the pool of top talent.

off that protective gear due to comfort or convenience issues.

As one of a person's five senses, it's crucial to ensure that their hearing remains viable long after they've left the workforce. In order to do that, both the employer and employee need to recognize the importance of not only identifying when hearing protection is warranted, but also mandating that hearing protection gear is worn consistently.

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## WELLNESS

### Where There's Smoke, There's Cancer

Smoke usually rises, but smoking has actually been falling. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), only 36.5 million adult Americans smoked cigarettes, which is down from 45.1 million in 2005. That being said, in an article in *The Washington Post* titled, "[Smoking declines dramatically but linked to 40 percent of cancer cases](#)," smoking-related cancer still accounts for 40 percent of all cancer diagnoses.



While every adult is free to make their own decisions regarding their health -- even bad decisions such as smoking, eating fatty or sugary foods, or not exercising -- they should be given the facts regarding the consequences. When it comes to smoking cigarettes, the consequences are usually dire.

Of those smokers who are then diagnosed with cancer that's been caused by smoking, data shows that more than half will die. From 2009 to 2013, the CDC noted that 660,000 people were diagnosed with tobacco-related cancer and 340,000 of those people died from it. That's a staggering statistic that should not be ignored.

Furthermore, in another *Washington Post* article titled, "[Forget those occasional cigarettes: There is no safe smoking level](#)," even people who smoke fewer than one cigarette a day, on average, have an increased risk of an early death compared to non-smokers. A study by the National Cancer Institute showed that the risk of an early death for these one-cigarette-per-day people rose 64 percent. If you smoke one to 10 cigarettes a day, then your risk of an early death increased to 87

percent. I'm not a gambling man, but I would consider that high a percentage to be an almost certainty.

Of course, some groups of adults smoke more than others. According to the first *Washington Post* article referenced, men, especially African American men, had the smallest decline in smoking along with people who didn't graduate high school or are over age 65. The good news from all of this is that the number of people smoking continues to drop.

This issue should not be ignored and employers should offer smoking cessation help to employees who want to quit. After all, smoking is an addiction and it's not easy to stop, but reducing the risk of cancer should be the goal of any individual.

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