



The five minute Christmas party guide

By Dónall Breen - 28 November 2019

For managers, HR and in-house legal counsel, Christmas parties can be a mixed blessing. Celebrating a hard year's work and blowing off some steam is cathartic but can lead to – complications.

This guide sets out our top tips for managing the risk of Mary from sales professing her love to half the team or John from accounts deciding now is a good time to settle the score with his arch-nemesis Tom.

Whilst every company will have their own values and ethos that will inevitably play a part in how things are handled, here are the basics we would recommend:

Before

- Speak to your staff! Managers should be reminded of their ongoing obligations and responsibilities at a work event – leading by example. Employees, in the spirit of your culture, need to understand that a Christmas party is not an excuse to completely blow out. Company rules continue to apply at company events. It may be a good juncture to remind staff about acceptable behaviour both within the workplace and elsewhere.
- Have a timetable. When will the official Christmas party end? A tragic case that went through the courts last year showed the line can be blurred if managers continue to 'manage the team' even at unofficial after-parties, but clear timelines ahead of the party should help mitigate this (see our previous article [here](#)). Consider having taxis pre-booked to encourage people to head home when the party is over.
- Is it inclusive? Have you invited your staff on family leave? Have you made sure that any employees with disabilities have been thought of? Remember, not everyone can skull pints as part of the team building - think of those who can't drink for health or religious reasons.
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During

- Think about having a dedicated 'bad cop', a well-regarded member of the senior leadership team who has agreed to take the metaphorical punch bowl away if the party is getting out of hand.
- Ensure managers/senior staff know what to do if someone gets verbally or physically aggressive. Then follow the steps if something goes

wrong (de-escalate, disperse).

- If you are going to post on social media, have one person assigned to do it and do it early in the night. Livestreaming Jess redecorating the inside of a swanky London restaurant is not the image most companies wish to project. Alternatively, just make a rule of no posting until the next day.
- When the Christmas party is over, it's over. If staff want to continue to an after-party that has not been organised by the company make sure everyone is aware that for example, drinks cannot be expensed, managers should not have their 'corporate hat' on.
- Be practical. Make sure drinks come with plenty of carby food and water. Have free taxis home to encourage those feeling worse for wear to call it a night. If you have an open bar think about limiting it to wines and beers.

After

- Let your managers know how you are going to deal with unexplained absences the next day. You should apply your rules fairly and consistently, preferably in accordance with any sickness absence policy.
- Be extra vigilant regarding gossip, rumours and potential issues. In the light of #MeToo it may be appropriate to take a more proactive approach to safeguard against problems coming out of the woodwork down the line.
- Stick to the plan. Do not be tempted to discipline employees at the party itself. Dealing with a high octane issue with a few drinks (or a sore head) is a recipe for disaster. If something arises that needs to be investigated ensure you give it the time and energy it deserves, following your usual disciplinary/grievance procedures. Avoid making decisions in the heat of the moment.

Hopefully, most of this should look like common sense. However, forewarned is forearmed. To quote the great philosopher of our time, Monica from 'Friends', – "Rules are good, rules help control the fun".