

# Are your office holiday parties inclusive?

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With the holiday season quickly approaching, employers across the country are beginning to prepare for their annual end-of-year soiree. Traditionally, these events have failed to recognize all beliefs, leaving certain workers feeling excluded and unhappy. HR professionals tasked with planning these festivities can become quickly overwhelmed with all of the considerations that need to be made.

Preparing for an inclusive end-of-year company event isn't as difficult as it may seem. When planning for the holiday season, keep these tips in mind to ensure your celebration is inclusive of all employees.

## **Encourage Sharing of Traditions**

For many employees, the holiday season is a very personal time of the year. Many of the traditions celebrated during this time are often instilled at a very young age and remain with them for life. Ask employees which holidays are important to them and recognize them throughout the year with an interfaith calendar. Larger companies can organize intercultural panels where all staff members have the opportunity to learn about

different festivals and sample traditional cuisine. Creating awareness of these different customs exposes team members to diversity across the organization and helps all employees feel included during this celebratory period.

### **Allow Employees to Opt-Out of Celebrations**

Holiday parties are exciting events for many employees. However, some may feel uncomfortable attending these annual events for both religious and personal reasons. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses don't celebrate holidays. Employees of other religious groups may have schedule conflicts disallowing them from being at the annual party. Some team members, such as neurodistinct professionals, may not feel comfortable socializing at these larger parties. Letting employees know that these events are completely optional will relieve pressure from those who may not want to participate for one reason or another.

### **Accommodate Dietary Restrictions**

These days, members of the general public adhere to a wide variety of diets. Many are fueled by religious beliefs while others follow rigid nutrition plans to lose weight or maintain a healthy lifestyle. It's important to serve food that meets employees' kosher, halal, vegetarian, and vegan dietary needs. Providing a variety of options might not be enough, as seeing certain meats next to their preferred dishes may be offensive to some people. For this reason, it might be best to also consider separating meals by diet.

### **Carefully Consider Music Selection at Holiday Parties**

The playlist for your end-of-year party shouldn't be filled with Christmas carols. In fact, it probably shouldn't have any at all. Using Christmas-themed music and decorations for your company's holiday soiree will lead some employees to feel uncomfortable and excluded. Instead, stick to playing current Top 40 hits, as well as nostalgic throwback tracks that everybody will enjoy reminiscing over. Employers should be considerate of music volume at these events too. Extremely loud music can cause sensory overload for neurodistinct employees with sensory issues, creating a very unpleasant environment for them. To avoid this, make sure songs are played at a reasonable volume allowing workers to interact without excessively raising their voices.

## **Remember to Invite Feedback from Employees**

While companies have made significant strides in creating more inclusive workplaces, nobody is perfect in this area. It's always best to take feedback from employees to understand what worked and what could have been implemented to make team members feel more included. Making submissions anonymous will allow team members to be open and honest about what they'd like to see from their organization in the future.

You're bound to make mistakes as you strive to make your company as inclusive as possible for all employees. What matters most is the effort you put into starting these initiatives and fostering their success. Consider implementing the above tips to ensure that your company remains inclusive of all members within its diverse workforce this holiday season.

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