

COMPANY HOLIDAY PARTIES 101



Planning a Corporate
Holiday Party that will
Bring Cheer to Even the
Company "Scrooge"



INTRODUCTION

Planning a holiday party for your company doesn't need to turn you into a "Scrooge". By following some guidelines and realizing that planning in advance is key, a holiday event can bring cheer to everyone. Even yourself.

Timing is Everything

Your initial planning might just be the single most important part of the corporate holiday party. If you are newly handed the task to pull together this year's event, start thinking about it right away. If you are given the task in August, trust us, it's not too early!

By dedicating bits of time early on in the process, you will save yourself headaches later on, and have a better chance for a smoother, wonderful, "holly, jolly" time for all.

Be Realistic: Should You Get Some Help?

Too often, an employee is tasked with planning a holiday party when they are already behind on their everyday tasks. If this is the case, you should ask yourself, "Is this going to have a negative effect on my job goals"? If you answered "yes" or even "maybe" to this question, consider hiring an event planner to help.

An event planner can take care of virtually everything for you, or be an invaluable guide to help _{you} in the planning process.



He or she will likely have many reliable contacts to help secure desirable dates, locations and vendors with much less effort than it'd take you (and sometimes with a discount to boot).

Hiring an event planner does not mean you relinquish all control. You can take responsibility for different parts of the party, and the event planner can fill in where needed.

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INITIAL PLANNING

Before any real planning takes place, the best thing to do is get feedback on last year's party. Create a small, anonymous questionnaire for everyone on staff.

Be sure to ask a lot of pointed, not vague, questions. Have people rate various aspects of the event. If you are given the task of putting on the party every year, have a survey like this ready to go in the few days following the party to keep on hand for next year.

Note:
nobody likes to be a "whiner", so be sure the survey is anonymous.



While waiting for the surveys to come back, find out from your supervisors what the budget is for the event. Are there any additional requirements? (i.e. no alcohol allowed, or a particular day of the week for the event).

Now that you have the surveys and the budget, you know the direction to take the planning. Get started in August or September, as venue and vendor dates fill up quickly this time of year.

VENUE & FOOD

What's the one thing *everyone* remembers from a party? The food!

Now is a good time to decide what portion of your budget will be dedicated to the food. This goes hand-in-hand with the venue decision, because oftentimes the venue is a restaurant or hall that provides cuisine or has a dedicated catering company.

Your event planner will likely have a plethora of venue resources based on your event type and budget. But if you aren't working with a planner, start searching for venues

early on using word-of-mouth, Yellow Pages, Google Maps (local business search), and other local directories.



Keep track of venues, features and pricing in a spreadsheet to compare and contrast options once you have all of them logged.

When deciding on food, always plan to have something available very early, even upon arrival. People want food, no matter the time of day. If you want to offer more expensive items, the appetizer period is a good time to do so. You'll get more "bang for your buck" as the guest will immediately have a good first impression.

Along this same vein, some sort of food, even if it's "munchies" should be available throughout the entire event. **The #1 reason people tend to leave holiday parties is that they were dissatisfied because there wasn't enough food.** Allow ample time for mingling and munching.



Your event planner can help you plan the best type and style of cuisine and the best way to serve it. This can vary based on type of event, date, and regional cultural differences. Keep in mind that in most regions the weather will be cold, so warm, comfort foods are typically a good fit. As always, don't forget to account for any special dietary needs when planning the menu.

Alcohol

Will alcohol be served? Consider past events. Did many of the employees partake in alcoholic beverages? If you have numbers from past events, this should help you plan your alcohol budget.



If you are on a strict budget and are worried the alcohol will put you over the edge, try offering a set number of tear-off “carnival”-type tickets to employees. For example, you could provide three tickets to each employee to redeem for beer, wine or other spirits.

This method essentially fixes your costs for alcohol, and those wishing for more drinks can pay with cash or bribe their co-workers for their tickets. In addition, this discourages too much drinking, which can tend to cause drama at company events.

Another idea is to provide a signature cocktail that aligns with your company or party theme, if you have one. If guests want something else, they can pay with cash.

One thing to keep in mind, however, is that if alcohol is served, you should budget extra for transportation. Whether you provide alternate transportation or give gas money to designated drivers, you should do everything possible to make sure guests have a happy, yet safe party.



Consider a venue that’s close to public transit and encourage guests to use that mode of transportation by offering to reimburse associated costs.

THEMES, DÉCOR & MUSIC

Decide if you want a theme for your company holiday party. When doing so, consider different ethnicities and religions. A holiday party need not be bland and boring, but really should cater to all employees and strive to be “politically correct”.

One good PC theme is a “winter holiday gathering”. This allows for celebration of the season separately from any religious holiday.

Other “politically correct” themes to consider:

A Greener Holiday Party – make the focus the environment with eco-friendly decorating and local food.

Charity Event – participate in a charity or gift-giving event for those less fortunate, or visit a nursing home to bring holiday cheer.

Choose a Color – get fun with this. “Red Hot Holiday”, “Green With Envy”, or “Good as Gold” color-themed parties can be a blast.

Choose a Time Period – have a blast from the past with a “Mod Holiday” theme or “80’s Holiday” party.

Tacky Sweater – ask everyone to break out their ugliest winter sweater and hold a contest for the worst one.

Gingerbread House – do a craft project such as building a gingerbread house or make-your-own holiday greetings.

Cookie Party – get a quote from a local bakery for everyone to participate, or have a bring-your-own cookie or sweets party.

New Year’s Party – ringing in a new year is something everyone can get on board with.

Décor

A company holiday party is not the time to put on a big show. Décor should be simple and non-offensive. Some colorful plants such as poinsettias can transform a room and can be kept in the office after the party is over. Small trees and lights are also easy ways to add some festive décor.

If you are having the party at a restaurant or hall, determine what decorations will already be in place that time of year. Visit a few days beforehand to see if you should add anything, otherwise, just keep it simple.



Classic Holiday Décor by Strategic Event Design for a Corporate Party

Music

The music can be a very subjective issue with many opinions. In general, you should try to appeal to the masses, but again, keep it light and simple. Depending on your crowd, you could consider a DJ. But this could get loud, and deter people from chatting. A soft speaker playing jazz in the background is always a classy route.

GAMES & GIFTING

It is a holiday party you're planning, after all!



Some sort of gift or game is typically expected. This is a great way (and time of year) to show that the company cares about its employees.

A simple way to convey this message is to offer door prizes. This could be a raffle or a small gift given to every attendee. People love gifts. You might be able to get local donations or bulk discounts from restaurants, coffee shops or department stores. Gift cards, gift baskets and trinkets work well for this. Other ideas are company-branded items like a calendar, mouse pad or mug.



Try using something like a plant that can “double duty” as décor and a gift. Let everyone know they can take one home at the end of the party.

Gifts, if you're planning to have them, can also be incorporated into the event's games. Most people are familiar with the “white elephant” gifting game. There's also Secret Santa and plenty of additional variations on the game of gifting. Other game ideas include “name that holiday song”, “holiday trivia” and “pass the present”.

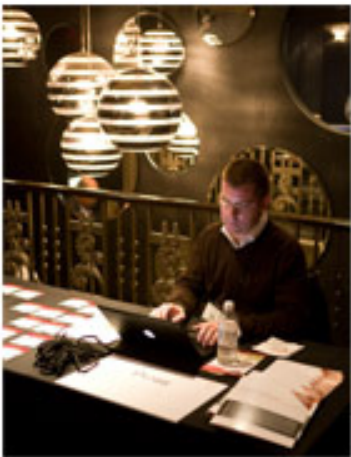
A wonderful way to incorporate gifting is by collaborating with a local food bank or children's organization, like Toys for Tots. Ask each employee to bring an item for donation. This is a great way to create a sense of partnership and teamwork, and leave the entire company with a smile on their faces.

CONCLUSION

As with many events, advanced planning is going to give you the greatest chance of a seamless, stress-free, memorable holiday party.

If planning your event is getting in the way of doing your job, consider talking to your supervisor about hiring an event planner to help with some, or all, of the event. It can be in the businesses' best interest to keep you focused on your job and let the experts handle making the event a success.

At Strategic Event Design, we know that planning a big event is all about details, details, details. Is event planning getting in the way of job? Let us plan your next big event. We work worldwide and no event is too small or large.



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