

Holiday do's and don'ts

By: Veronica Cool ⌚ December 18, 2015



COOL TIPS

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The holidays are here! Yes, this is the time to disconnect and enjoy the family and the season, but this is also the time to express our gratitude for clients, colleagues and partners who contribute to our daily wellbeing and success.

But celebrating the holidays at work is often a minefield of potential pitfalls, faux pas and challenges. Unless, of course, you have a very generous budget and all employees will be gifted with iPads and holiday bonuses! But, per a recent Society of Human Resource Management study, 74 percent of companies plan to give no gifts in 2015, up from 65 percent in 2013; 69 percent of companies polled said they won't give nonperformance-based bonuses either. The general consensus is that paying bonuses is strictly based on performance.

And if you choose to provide gifts to celebrate, do keep in mind these pointers:

- Skip the very personal items, such as jewelry and clothing.
- Be wary of the gag gifts. The Minions Fart Gun is absolutely hysterical to every 12 year-old on the planet but probably no one else in your office.
- Consider gifts that represent the mission of your organization or the product offerings of the corporation. I mean, if Under Armour wanted to thank me with an extra-large bag of hoodies, I would be exceedingly grateful. (Hint hint.)
- Motivational books and seminars could be welcomed if you have created a culture where the benefits and impact of such resources are valued.
- Food and fruit baskets are always lovely gifts.
- Consider the culture and religion of each employee to ensure no offense is committed inadvertently. For instance, a bottle of wine for a Muslim employee wouldn't be well-received.

Moreover, review the "mandatory" secret Santa or white-elephant gift exchanges. Some employees dread the forced involvement. If the team opts for a gift-exchange, set a low limit to avoid burdening folks financially.

There's also some discomfort around the perceived obligation to provide a gift to the boss. Some leaders have clearly indicated gifts won't be accepted, that the commitment of the team throughout the year is a more-than-sufficient reward for him or her. As for the company holiday party, keep in mind that this should be a celebration of the season and the company's success, attributable to the hard work and dedication of the employees. First and foremost, express authentic gratitude. A genuine expression to your team for their efforts goes a long way to fostering a culture of value.

Cultural exchange

And remember, the party is a business celebration, not to be confused with a religious festival. In the past, most organizations would add a menorah alongside the Christmas tree and be satisfied that diversity now existed and all groups would be acknowledged appropriately. Of course, there's Ramadan, Diwali and Kwanzaa and other celebrations. Our workforce is very diverse, most likely with employees celebrating one of these holidays or none at all.

Be respectful of these differences by taking an interest in other people's traditions and making them feel welcome. Consider a New Year's party to align the beginning of the new year with a renewed focus on the mission and goals of the organization.

You may certainly inquire as to how others celebrate their holidays and leverage this opportunity to learn about other cultures and traditions. For instance, a large portion of Hispanics celebrate Noche Buena, or Christmas Eve, with a big family feast. Los Reyes Magos, or Three Kings Day (or Epiphany) is celebrated Jan. 6, where families go around to each other's homes and deliver presents for the children. (I'm still waiting for that huge Barbie house, incidentally.)

Behaving inclusively is more than just changing labels and inserting the appropriate term. Seek input or ideas from as many employee groups as possible to ensure people feel included, and allow employees to opt out of the festivities without negative repercussions or "unofficial" penalties.

The best piece of advice to truly celebrate the season: Allow your folks enough time to get the end-of-year work done without excessive pressure and stress and, if possible, grant them extra time off to rest, recharge and celebrate.

Feliz Navidad Amigos!

(And if you just can't help yourself and must show your appreciation to me, please consider a contribution to Open Society (www.OSIBaltimore.org) or Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Greater Chesapeake (www.biglittle.org). Both are organizations with

stellar missions to support our Baltimore. Or the Barbie house would be nice. Really nice.)

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