

2017 Law Firm Holiday Party Guide for Surviving and Thriving

This time of year, most professionals have calendars that are filled with company holiday parties, client holiday soirées and holiday networking mixers. After all, 'tis the season! Whether the dress code is black tie or ugly sweater, though, misbehavior at professional holiday events is absolutely unacceptable. Instead, why not use this year's holiday gatherings as a chance to impress and connect with your peers, and perhaps even walk away with some tangible [new business](#) prospects for 2018?

Act Accordingly

For starters, **there should be zero funny business**. We have certainly all read and seen the standard lists of "dos and don'ts" for company holiday parties. This year, however, in our post-Weinstein era, you better believe that human resource departments are keeping an extra-close eye on holiday party conduct.

As [reported by The Wall Street Journal](#), "scores of businesses are canceling open bars, abolishing hard liquor or forgoing dark nightclub settings for well-lit or family-friendly venues" to ward off questionable behavior this holiday party season. According to the article, 11 percent of employers dropped plans to host holiday parties altogether this year, compared to just 4 percent last year – a sharp decrease in light of our strengthening economy and job growth rates.

Regardless of what your firm and clients have planned for this year's holiday festivities, you should always be familiar and compliant with respective sexual harassment policies. Being removed from the office setting does not excuse lower standards of conduct, so it's probably best to avoid the mistletoe with anyone other than your date. America can't handle another Harvey.

Be Comfortable Conversing

Holiday parties can be a place where you genuinely – perhaps for the first time ever – connect with your colleagues and clients. Sometimes you just need to pull people away from his or her daily routine to establish rapport. If the thought of impromptu conversations with colleagues or strangers makes you shudder, then take some tips from writer and Georgia Public Broadcasting radio host Celeste Headlee.

Headlee advised in a [recent TED Talk](#) that you should "enter every conversation assuming that you have something to learn ... set aside your personal opinion. Everyone is an expert in something." She also suggests that it's crucial to ask open-ended questions. "Ask 'What was that like?' and 'How did that feel?' because you need to let them describe it. Then they have to stop for a moment to think about it. You'll get a much more interesting



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response.”

Don't be afraid to strike up a conversation with somebody new, particularly a potential new internal or external client. Is there a partner in your firm you've been dying (but afraid) to talk strategy with or a potential client with whom you've been hoping to make inroads? A holiday party or networking event is the perfect time to introduce yourself. While business will inevitably come up, don't dwell on it for the entire conversation. Instead, establish common ground on a personal level. Same alma mater? Kids? Golf? Music? Holiday travel plans?

Make sure you have that individual's contact information before you leave and follow up to arrange to meet for coffee or lunch to discuss business in the new year. Holiday gatherings are an opportunity for you to meet new people, and the person you connect with may wind up being your next client or the partner who adds you to their team for a future case.

Avoid Skipping

If your holiday party rolls around and you find yourself highly unmotivated to attend (ahem, Scrooge), **resist the urge to skip**. Law firms, businesses and networking organizations plan holiday events as rewards and gestures of goodwill. It's extremely important to show face – even if just for a short time.

Career expert and official LinkedIn spokesperson Nicole Williams, in [this holiday party Business Insider article](#), noted that the holiday party “is unlike any other party over the course of the year ... This is the one that everyone shows up to, that your CEO is likely to be at, that your boss's boss is likely to be at.” Try to rally that holiday cheer and make an appearance. You won't regret it.

Watch Your Consumption

Last but not least, **keep your alcohol consumption in check**. It's the advice that we've all received, but some seem to need an annual reminder. Try to resist that open bar temptation (it can be done), and consider limiting yourself to just one or two drinks. The drunken jokes you make on Friday will be much less humorous in the elevator the following Monday morning.

Also remember that not everyone will be drinking, so if you do get out of line, the sober attendees will definitely take notice. A professional holiday gathering is neither the time nor the place to test your blood alcohol limits, and a lost reputation is hard to regain.

Holiday parties should be enjoyed respectfully and tastefully. Make the most of this season and relish every moment! If you would like to share a holiday party success story or tip, feel free to contact me, [Bethany Early](#), at bearly@jaffepr.com. Wishing you the happiest of all holiday seasons!