

## Making the holidays happy for your employees



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## **Making the holidays happy for your employees.**

Tis the season for parties, presents, cookies, and cheer. Between November 1st and January 30th, there are over 100 holidays to celebrate. Chances are your employees will be celebrating anywhere from 3 to 7 of them. And that doesn't include birthdays that happen to be in the three-month window.

Many companies find it valuable to host a holiday get together, where employees, management, and owners can come together in a relaxed environment and enjoy each other's company.

It's not only fashionable to do this kind of holiday party; it works to bring a feeling of accomplishment, success and camaraderie to your employees. An astonishing 90% of all companies plan some party in the latter part of December.

Gift giving and employee recognition is also common at this time of the year. It is a way to provide a lasting memento to remind your employees through the next year that they are valued. Often, it's a simple reminder, a physical gift that is useful, such as a mug, a note holder, correspondence folder, sports blanket, photo frame or maybe even a jacket or sweater.

Over the past couple of years, the trend for giving holiday gifts to employees has increased, according to a Career Builder survey. Almost half of all companies will be giving gifts to their employees this year.

It's not as challenging as you think to plan this party or to budget out gifts for your employees. We have some steps here that will help take the stress out of planning and making sure that your employees feel prized and respected.

### **How To Host A Holiday Party That's Meaningful**

According to Inc magazine, the best type of holiday parties happen outside of the office and include fun activities such as board games and good food. A low-key, relaxed event means more to your employees.

Over half of all workers are not excited or have a genuine desire to attend the holiday party, according to the same CareerBuilder survey. So how can we change that?

Nearly half of all businesses host the holiday party right in the office. The companies do very little to change the atmosphere and often this is seen as just another catered lunch. Or if the party is after hours, it could be viewed as an unpaid meeting. If your party is at the office make it decorative and fun.

While it is an additional expense, many employees are much more excited to leave the office for a holiday party. Many restaurants have a back room or a partitioned off area where your employees can enjoy slightly more private accommodations. For larger companies, small ballrooms or events spaces can be rented out.

But if you haven't planned far enough ahead of time and you're stuck having your get together in the office, do spend the time and money to make the office space look festive and cheerful. Do enough to make sure that the regular work activities are pushed to the back, and the area focuses on having a good time.

### **Encourage Mixing**

Columbia University did a study on people during company mixers and found that the majority of people speak to the same people and coworkers that they usually work with.



Having a small award ceremony can change all that and introduce new people. Celebrate achievements and milestones openly. Many people will follow a suggestion to talk to a new person if management recommends it. As odd as it seems, many people are afraid to speak to new people, fearing they will interrupt a conversation. When management gives the incentive to talk to new people, they find it easier to break the ice.

Another way to overcome the awkwardness is to provide team bonding activities. Simple childish games, such as guessing how many candies are in a jar or a scavenger hunt can encourage conversation and laughter.

One of the best games we saw was an impromptu Secret Santa. At each seat, there was a little slip of paper that indicated a position at another table. Each person was then given a blank card and asked to write a heartfelt and straightforward Holiday greeting for that person. Most people did not know the new person and many friendships were started that day.

### **Give The Gift That Keeps On Giving**

Shopping for small gifts for your employees can be nerve-wracking. What would be perfect for one person could fall flat for another. But, giving gifts doesn't need to be hard if you do it smart.

Make a list and be sure to check it twice

Many employees don't expect big bonuses or gifts over the top. However, they also hope you would spend a few dollars on them and avoid the cheapest offerings. In this case, meaningful is much more important than a dollar figure.

Be sure to have everyone that worked for your company on the list and gift appropriately for their level of seniority. Forgetting someone is worse than giving no gifts at all.

Make sure you go over the list several times to make sure you are not favoring any particular department or person. Favoritism could ruin the whole experience.

Make the gifts personal or have a professional company develop a common gift that has a broad appeal celebrating something everyone can relate to.

Your employees want to know that you care about them as people, not just as numbers. A handwritten, thank you note that accompanies the gift will mean a lot to the recipient.

You don't need to write a letter to everyone of your employees. A small card with 2 or 3 sentences that acknowledges your employees is fine.

One very thoughtful gift we've seen given was at a company with nearly a 100 employees. A very simple coffee mug with the company name was given to each employee. Inside the cup was a small handwritten note and included another little gift. Several women enjoyed gardening and they received packets of seeds. There was a fishing club that started through the company and those people each received a fishing lure. The employees were more pleased that management and the owners took the time and effort to learn about their hobbies than they cared about the present. Talking to the owners after the party was over, they informed us that each present cost less than \$7.50. We recommend to



our clients that you pick a budget you're comfortable with

### **But don't get too personal**

Acknowledging the interests and activities of your employees is a great way to develop rapport and appreciation. But if you start bringing an employee's personal life into the workplace, they could resent you for it. Make sure the gift is for a topic that is well known to other employees.

We recommend you be sure that any gift you give cannot be mistaken for inappropriate or suggestive. Clothing (other than logo material given to everyone), toiletries, and alcohol are too personal and may suggest an inappropriate relationship. Any gift that is related to sex or criminal activity is strictly off limits. Our creative team at awarenessIDEAS and AwardsIDEAS.com will help you with ideas and product design that at any price level the look will have a high perceived value.

Gifts that are too expensive might be looked upon as showing favoritism. If an individual employee shows exceptional service than any award should be given in a public ceremony with a detailed explanation of why this employee is getting a more substantial gift. You will also have to make sure that any other employee that shows the same level of dedication to the company receives a similar valuable gift.

## A few more gift ideas

A custom snow ornament with your company's logo on it.

Holiday t-shirts or jackets with your company name.

Home related ice bucket, vase or clock for the holiday season

Personalized gift baskets – these can be created to match the activities of your employees, such as fruit, chocolate,; include a lottery ticket.

A holiday picture frame for your employees with a positive message on it.



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