

Getting Your Employees in the Holiday Mood WITHOUT GETTING SUED! Part 2

Holiday Parties on a Budget

With a continued struggling economy for many, it is no surprise that employers may not be in the mood to host extravagant Holiday parties this year. Instead, some will opt for scaled down celebrations, to say “thank you” and reward employees for a long year’s work. If you are thinking about toning down the cost and size of your Holiday get-together, please keep these important suggestions in mind.

Don’t Mix Layoffs with a Lavish Party

When a company has experienced recent layoffs, or one is looming in the near future, or if there is a “no raises” ban in effect, stop and think about the message that may be sent by throwing an extravagant party. Holiday parties are meant to boost morale. This can back-fire if your employees, instead of feeling appreciated, are calculating whether the cost of the champagne and shrimp cocktails might have enabled you to retain their recently laid off co-workers.

Careful if You Are Supplying the Booze

If you host a party at your home to save money, and you are serving alcohol, be sure to arrange for no-cost transportation for those guests who overindulge. If an attendee injures someone or himself while driving from your house, you could incur personal liability.

Hire a Bartender

One excellent practice at any Holiday party is to hire a professional bartender. If that is not an option, you should ensure that all employees enjoying alcohol are at least 21. In addition, monitor alcohol consumption and someone should cut off anyone who appears inebriated.

Set Clear Guidelines if Hosting a Party at Work

If you have an at-work party, make clear that attendance is voluntary and that employees who attend will not be paid.



Don’t Assume Signed Releases Mean You’re Off the Hook

Some companies consider having employees sign liability releases where alcohol will be served. Such waivers can be challenged in state courts.

Avoid Offensive “White Elephant” Gifts

In an attempt to keep gift-giving costs low, some companies may encourage staff members to exchange what are known as “white elephant” gifts. Remind employees to avoid gifts that might be offensive to others. Although some may think that the “fishnet stocking lamp” from the movie “A Christmas Story” is hysterical, not everyone may share your sense of humor.

With these simple guidelines in hand, we hope that you and your employees will have a safe, fun and (hopefully) liability free Holiday season.

Happy Holidays from Fisher & Phillips LLP