

# Holiday Parties: Three Tips to Stay Off Santa's Naughty List

By Chris Morehead  
For the Oregon Beer Growler

Most craft beer industry (CBI) employers will be throwing a shindig in the coming weeks to celebrate the holiday season as well as the employees and hard work that went into the previous year. Beer (and other adult libations) will be consumed, inhibitions will undoubtedly loosen and stories will be shared. And why shouldn't they? Company holiday parties are held in order to strengthen existing bonds and help build positive workplace relationships.

But, from an employment law perspective, holiday parties also have an inherent degree of risk. Who hasn't witnessed or heard about an employee having a little too much "Christmas cheer," or a couple of employees getting a little too friendly? The truth is, my firm has defended dozens of claims that originated at a holiday party, when something at a well-meaning, company-sponsored event went awry.

Here are some tips CBI employers should consider when planning this year's holiday party:

## 1. TRANSPORTATION:

Breweries and brewpubs often have holiday parties on company premises or at the owner's home. Beer, and more, will be present, and it will be consumed. But if an employee or other guest leaves drunk (certainly not inconceivable) and gets behind the wheel, there are definite safety and liability concerns. Consider getting taxi vouchers beforehand and passing them out at the party. In places where Uber and Lyft operate, consider prearranging to distribute codes that automatically bill the company — not the rider — for the trip fare. This will not only be greatly appreciated by the guests, but it should also help ease the mind that everyone is getting home safely.

## 2. OPEN BAR? HIRE A PRO:

While many would recommend not having an open bar (stocked with the hard stuff)

in the first place, the reality is that many companies do so anyway. If your company falls in that category, consider spending a few extra dollars to hire a bartender. That might sound silly if many of your employees are perfectly qualified for the role, but the reality is that if an employee is performing "work," they are entitled to compensation. And while it might be extremely unlikely that the employee would complain or say something at the party, that could change if the employment relationship ever sours and the employee wants payback (literally and figuratively). In addition, while everyone else is enjoying that new porter or altbier, having a trained, sober professional present will help you keep an eye out to make sure no one is getting overserved.

## 3. HAVE FUN, BUT BE MINDFUL OF ALL:

Most CBI employers are small, and the employees get along. That tends to create a laid-back atmosphere, and people aren't worried about offending each other. While that is certainly a positive work environment, and should be applauded, it's important to remember that guests at holiday parties are generally outsiders, and might not be accustomed to your company's culture or personalities. While this may be stating the obvious to some, CBI employers should try to avoid alienating their guests. Some simple tips include: making sure it's called the "holiday" party and not the "Christmas" party; don't use religious-themed decorations; when sending out invitations, use neutral language like "partner" or "significant other" rather than "husband" and "wife;" mistletoe is a bad idea altogether, as is asking about plans to get married or having kids; and just because your friends think an off-color joke is funny, it doesn't mean everyone else does.

The bottom line is that all your employees and guests should leave the holiday party with the same (or hopefully even better) perception of your company. Happy holidays!



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