

THERE'S NO PLACE BUT HOME FOR THE HOLIDAY PARTY: HOW TO SAFELY CELEBRATE YOUR ORGANIZATION THIS YEAR

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With 2020 coming to a close, the first line of “Auld Lang Syne”— “Should auld acquaintance be forgot?”—is on our minds. In this pandemic age, now-familiar terms like “testing,” “mask,” and “work-from-home” have earned entirely new and deeper meanings. And newer terms like “social distancing” and “COVID circle” have become daily (hourly?) utterances. As a leader in your organization, you may be wondering: Should the auld annual party be forgot?

Rather than lament that things are not the same, though, why not find a silver lining? After all, COVID-19 won't stop the holidays from coming. A remote or virtual celebration presents opportunities that your organization might not have with an in-person, traditional event. This is a leadership opportunity. Holding an engaging, rewarding event will require out-of-the-box thinking, positivity, and strong leadership. This will be true from the highest level of management through all members of the party planning committee.

But we have confidence you can host a virtual celebration that could be used to recognize hard effort, support a charitable cause, or just simply add some levity to these otherwise dark times. And you can do so in a way that does not have colleagues feeling left out of the fun because of their age, gender, religious views, race, or health concerns.

A HOLIDAY PARTY (AT HOME) IS IMPORTANT, NOW MORE THAN EVER

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In [a recent survey of 189 companies](#), only 23% reported that they are planning a holiday party this year; 54% are not, and 23% are undecided or waiting for guidance. Of the 23% planning to celebrate, 74% will do so virtually. While it appears that a very small number of companies still anticipate holding in-person events, given the multitude of new, revived, or anticipated COVID-19 mitigation orders, we would expect many of those in-person plans to soon change.

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TOP 4 SUGGESTIONS FOR 2020 HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS

With many employees at home, generally, and everyone missing coffee station camaraderie, organizations are looking for morale-boosting ideas. Here are our how-to tips for a virtual event.

1. Make events voluntary. From whether your employees show up at all to how much they participate, remember that while year-end company celebrations are professional, work-related events, they are optional. Don't put pressure on already stressed staff to add one more thing to their list. Everyone won't be interested, just like in any other year — and that's okay.

2. Offer multiple options. Inclusivity creates space for people to be their authentic selves. And some people would rather watch hours of made-for-TV movies alone than hop on another video happy hour. Consider offering more than one way for your team to celebrate so everyone can feel special.

For example, virtual mixology classes and wine tastings are proving to be popular, but they can exclude those who don't drink alcohol because of their age, religious beliefs, or experience with substance or alcohol use disorders. Gather input from a diverse group of employees to ensure your plans aren't unintentionally excluding anyone. Perhaps your workforce could opt into one of several options: a mixology class, a cooking experience, a craft project, or a gift card to a food delivery service.

3. Remind everyone about company policies. Now is a good opportunity to remind everyone that, even in a remote celebration, company policies apply. For example, any event, whether in person or on a screen, might be recorded, photographed, or turned into an unflattering screenshot.

Harassment can be more prevalent online than it is in person.

And even at home and behind a camera, employees should be appropriately dressed and take it easy on the drinks. Send out your harassment, drug and alcohol, and social media policies (you do have a social media policy, yes?) in advance of your events. Before doing so, consider whether updates to your policies are warranted, to more specifically address the current nature of work in your organization.

4. Get creative. There are lots of great ideas out there to make your employees feel special — and often for far less than the cost of a traditional in-person event. Here's a list of what our clients (and we!) are booking and looking into:

- **Videoconferencing with a twist:** This is a great opportunity for colleagues who normally would not be at the same holiday party to network and get to know one another — but do not limit yourself to another Zoom happy hour. We are seeing movie watch parties, guided crafting and cooking sessions with materials or gift cards to buy them shipped out in advance, and virtual escape rooms. Our own current front runner, Preciate, is videoconferencing software that feels more like a game, letting you walk around a virtual party room, bobbing into and out of conversations like you would in person. Zoom and similar platforms have proven to be solutions for business purposes. Finding something different for social purposes will engage your workforce in a new way.
- **No-screen options:** Many who spend an entire day behind a computer screen would appreciate something celebratory that does not involve one. Try shipping gingerbread house kits for an on-your-own-time contest, high-end branded swag, and festive gift baskets. Perhaps your event includes a suggestion that each worker's family make the gingerbread house and then record and submit a one-minute (or less) video of the group gathered around their final creation. The planning committee can assign some light-hearted prizes (such as Most Creative, Don't Quit Your Day Job, Picture Perfect). A consolidated video of all submissions with a message from leadership might then be shared with the team.
- **Bonuses and charity:** With the holiday party line item significantly altered, perhaps look into larger than typical year-end bonuses, gift cards, and increases to company

matches on employee charitable contributions (or the option to decline a tangible gift and make a donation to a local food bank or other charity instead). Perhaps your organization could be divided into teams for an online Family Feud or similar gameshow tournament, with the winning team selecting the charity to whom a sizable donation will be made. A structure like this, with a charitable purpose behind it, can be useful when coaxing reluctant team members to try something different.

- **Health and wellness gifts:** Employees' physical and emotional health has been a top concern this year. That will remain the case for quite some time. Encourage and support wellness with year-end gifts such as subscriptions for meditation, exercise, and weight loss software; audiobook and video learning services; and healthy meal kits.

In closing, this has been a year of unprecedented pivots. From our perspective, organizations that pivot, once more, toward a virtual year-end or holiday event are on the mark. With strong leadership, some measure of creativity, and a determined purpose, your virtual event can be more memorable than the auld parties of the past.