



PEOPLE & HUMAN RESOURCES

Broken glasses, chairs and bones: Five ways to avoid a disastrous Christmas party

KAREN GATELY / Tuesday, December 11, 2018



Corporate Dojo founder Karen Gately. Source: Supplied.

January should be a great time of year to regroup, recharge and look ahead. Assuming, that is, you've managed to 'down tools' for a while over the Christmas period. But thanks to the myriad of issues, ranging from the comical to the tragic, that arise from the staff Christmas party for many business owners, its anything but an energising time.

Getting your team and business through the festive season 'unscathed' takes a deliberate approach. Start by ensuring your team are well aware of what can go wrong and the role they are expected to play to avoid potential issues. Here are some of the most important risks any business owner needs to manage.

1. Loss of life. Let's deal with the most extreme end of the risk spectrum first. Accidents happen. It's a sad reality that people have lost their lives at and travelling home from work events. It's important to appreciate what may seem like harmless fun can have devastating consequences. Dancing on the bar, for example, can quickly turn ugly when someone slips and hits their head.
2. Unlawful and immoral conduct. Sexual harassment and assault, bullying, theft and willful property damage are just some of the poor behaviours some people bring to work events.
3. Damaged property and physical injury. Furniture, computer equipment, glass, walls and bones are the things that most often get broken at Christmas parties that get out of hand.
4. Ruined reputations and careers. Oversharing of personal information, aggressive attitudes, passionate public displays of affection and random decisions to get naked. The list of ways in which people behave that undermine their credibility is long and varied.
5. Damaged relationships. The festive spirit, typically mixed with alcohol, can at times make people say things they otherwise wouldn't. Lost trust and respect are all too common consequences of poor judgement at a Christmas party.

Here are some important steps you can take to avoid these disasters from happening.

1. Educate. Ensure your team understand the risks. Help them to appreciate the impact the festive spirit can have on our judgment and choices when it comes to drinking and taking risks. Give guidance as to how they can keep not only themselves safe, but also one another.
2. Set expectations. Be clear about how everyone is expected to behave. Remind people that while the event is after hours or off-site, it remains an extension of the workplace, so the same rules of professional conduct apply. Encourage people to relax and enjoy themselves, but ensure also they behave in ways that demonstrate respect for both themselves and other people.
3. Serve alcohol responsibly. It's important to understand employers may not be in a position to insist on standards of conduct if they have served unlimited free alcohol. In a landmark ruling, the Fair Work Commission [found](#) a team member who sexually harassed colleagues and told his employer to "fu*k off" at a Christmas party had been unfairly sacked. Stop serving alcohol to people who have already had enough and take steps to ensure inebriated team members get home safely.
4. Put people in charge. Make it clear to every leader they are 'on duty' and expected to lead by example. Ask that they look out for the team and intervene when problematic behaviours arise. Appoint an event manager whose job it is to monitor how people are interacting and to act when trouble is brewing.
5. Call an official end to the function, at which point people are expected to leave the venue. This is an important step in limiting your liability for what happens when the party is over, as some people may choose to 'kick on' in their own time, at their own cost.



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