

## Christmas party disasters to avoid (and how to avoid them)

[Home](#) > [News](#)

by HRD | 14 Nov 2018



Employees often relish the opportunity to see their boss have a bit fun at the Christmas party, according to Karen Gately, founder of Corporate Dojo.

Consequently, HR can behave in ways that are more familiar or relaxed. And whilst this is permitted during the festive period, practitioners need to act within reason and remain in control.

If leaders do end up lowering their inhibitions and letting their guard down, Gately said they could face problems if they find they need to discipline staff for inappropriate behaviour. "If you want to hold someone accountable for something, you need to demonstrate behaviours that you're expecting from everyone else – so if you're getting untidy, then your credibility is clearly undermined," Gately told HRD. "Also, you can't afford to be off duty because if somebody gets hurt or behaves in a way that sees them marched out the door, and HR was there, then quite reasonably people are going to be asking what HR was doing and why they didn't step in."

According to Gately, while the list of things that can and do go wrong is long and varied, among those that you need to worry about most include these:

### **Ruined reputations**

Imagine the difficulty a leader would have managing their team when at the Christmas party they chose to drunkenly share inappropriate information about their love life. Contemplate the reputational damage a senior leader had to undergo by becoming amorous with a junior team member– in full sight of their colleagues. Is it really worth it?

### **Damaged property and physical injury**

Broken photocopiers aren't the only fallout of raucous Christmas parties. One individual I met managed to stagger through the office, fall over a chair and put his hand through a computer screen. The damage done to his arm, ego and reputation was far more than the IT department could fix the next day.

### **Bruised egos and broken relationships**

When people 'let loose' they can choose to say things they otherwise wouldn't. Take, for example, the team member who chose to share her views of the CEOs performance at the staff Christmas party. Just as destructive are the people who raise concerns about their colleague's performance or behaviour, while everyone else is just trying to have fun.

### **Unlawful and immoral conduct**

Drunk driving, sexual assault, theft and wilful property damage are just some of the crimes people have committed during sponsored work events. The potential consequences for employers found to be negligent should not be underestimated. The seriousness of these issues should be enough to encourage employers to take proactive steps to educate and supervise their team.

### **Loss of life**

At the most extreme end of the risk spectrum is that someone loses their life. It's a sad reality that accidents do happen and people have lost their lives during, and travelling home from work events. It's important to appreciate that behaviours don't have to be extreme for the consequences to be. While dancing on the bar for example, may seem like harmless fun, it's far from it when someone slips and hits their head.

According to Gately, important steps you can take to avoid these disasters. HRD has listed them below.

### **Educate**

Communicate with your team about the inherent dangers of work social activities, especially at this time of year. Encourage people to be mindful of the impact the festive spirit can have on our judgment and choices when it comes to drinking and taking risks. Share advice on steps people can take to keep themselves and others around them safe.

**Be clear about what is expected**

Talk to your team about how everyone is expected to behave at work sponsored events. Help people to understand that while the event may be after hours and even off site – it remains an extension of the workplace, and therefore the same rules of professional conduct apply. While encouraging a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere, expect people to behave in ways that demonstrate respect for both themselves and other people.

**Serve alcohol responsibly**

While it's fine to be generous, limit the amount of alcohol you make freely available. Make sure you also serve food. People are entirely more likely to become intoxicated if drinking on an empty stomach. Ensure you stop serving alcohol to people who have already had enough and take steps to ensure inebriated team members get home safely.

**Put people in charge**

While it's every leader's responsibility to look out for the team and intervene when problematic behaviours arise, it helps to appoint an event manager. Make it someone's job to monitor how people are interacting and to act when trouble is brewing. Empower them also to call an official end to the function, at which point expect people are to leave the venue. This is an important step in limiting your liability for what happens if some people choose to 'kick on' in their own time, at their own cost.