



How to Avoid Office Party Nightmares

Avoid the possibility of upending a career or becoming the punch line of everyone's joke! When it comes to office party behaviors, try to remember one abiding principle – always maintain your professionalism in every business setting. Understanding this will make the following practical tips and hints mere formalities.

Dress for Success

If the party is during work or immediately after, business attire is called for. If the party is later in the evening or the weekend, check with the host or coworkers for a heads-up. What you wear will reflect on you professionally. So anything tight, short, provocative or revealing should be left at home along with your jeans, T-shirts and baseball caps. A good rule of thumb is to always dress up a notch.

Eat & Drink in Moderation

Drinking to excess is at the heart of almost every office party horror story. It lowers inhibitions and distorts gross motor skills, inevitably leading to saying something foolish or acting reckless. Likewise, do not engage in a feeding frenzy. You're there for the fellowship, not food. If a buffet is served, resist the temptation of heaping mounds of food on your plate – and never eat directly from the buffet table. Be sensible in everything you consume.

Mingle

Office parties might be one of the few times during the year when you get to see company executives or others outside your realm. Use this opportunity to introduce yourself to them, network with others, and make new connections. Try to extend your reach beyond the same old office crowd. Socialize by being friendly, circulating, and spending several minutes with each group.

Be Cordial, Not Caustic

It is taboo to talk about politics, sex or religion in the workplace, and this applies to office parties, too. The most genial office party can become a breeding ground for unacceptable behavior, harassment or discrimination. You can't rewind ill-advised behavior and press the "delete" button to erase hostile remarks, racy suggestions or blatant bigotry. Instead, keep the conversation away from work. It's okay to discuss light, innocent topics, including travel plans, restaurants, kids, pets and sports. Better yet, it's often not what you say, but what others have to say that makes for a good conversation. The safest and best opening line is to ask someone to "tell me about...", and you'll find that people have little problem talking about themselves.



Be Gracious and Considerate

Common courtesy goes a long way. Always respond to RSVPs by the due date. Office parties are not events to blow off, so count on staying at least an hour, or sit through the dinner if that is offered. On the flip side, don't be the last to leave, unless you're part of the clean-up crew. Make sure you thank the bosses, the hosts and anyone else who coordinated the party for their efforts, the party and their work. Show them how classy you truly are.

Remembering to use common sense, along with these straightforward guidelines, may not necessarily make you "healthy, wealthy and wise," but you will more easily navigate the potential holiday party minefield, maintain your professionalism and simplify your life at work.

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