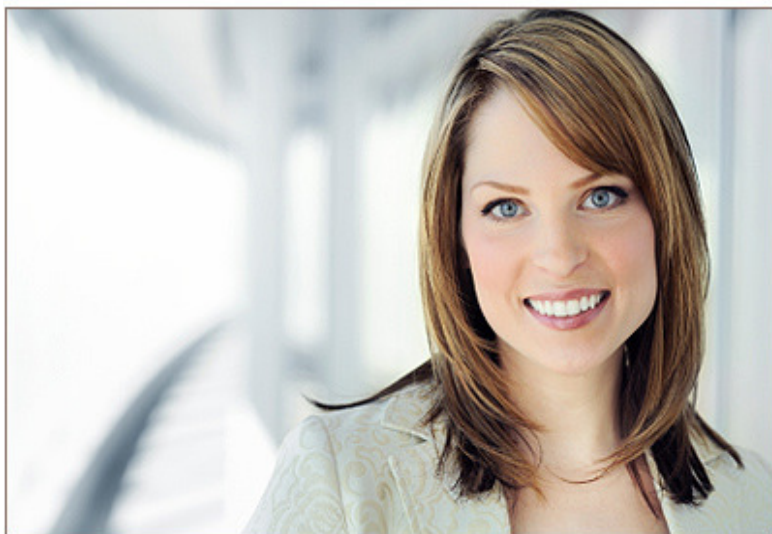


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Human Resources & Health and Safety



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Do you employ staff?

Christmas Parties

The Benefits of Having a Party

The majority of people look forward to the arrival of Christmas, a time of year in which many people wrap themselves up in coats and scarves and head to the pub for a bit of festive cheer. We all work hard and deserve a bit of Christmas cheer! Not only do people enjoy celebrating the season with their friends and family, but many people enjoy being able to indulge and celebrate with their colleagues as well. Holding a Christmas party is a great way to boost the morale of employees and make them feel part of a team. It enables employees to blow off some steam together, and it also satisfies an element of their reward package with social activities being a way for employers to show their appreciation for all the hard work done throughout the year.

The Dangers of Having a Party

Unfortunately, having a Christmas party may not be all good. Christmas tends to be a time of high alcohol consumption, something which we all know can lead to a person's inhibitions being lowered. Under the influence of alcohol colleagues may say things to one another that they should not be saying and this could lead to offence being taken or arguments/violence. If employees fall out with one another at a party it doesn't always end there with this sometimes leading to a situation becoming unmanageable.

Employees can also feel discriminated or harassed due to inappropriate behaviour at a party, or even by the party itself! Some employees do not eat certain foods, drink alcohol, or even celebrate Christmas, and therefore feel offended by the pressure to attend such events.

Another danger of colleagues drinking and partying together over Christmas is that this could lead to gossip that will follow them into the New Year. Where lower inhibitions are found sometimes romances are found too. Colleagues

who may normally just be friends could find themselves together over Christmas. A short affair could lead to gossip and story-telling, causing embarrassment and uncomfortableness for those involved, whilst a long affair could result in colleagues dating, breaking up, and then causing problems in the office.

All of these dangers could lead to a tribunal as Ross Coates Solicitors found when a previous employee Ms Nixon raised a claim of constructive dismissal and discrimination against them and won. Ms Nixon became pregnant after a Christmas party and was subject to gossip and rumours, and then when she raised a grievance she was not dealt with sensitively.

What We Recommend

One of the best ways to avoid these dangers is to make sure you have the right policies in place. An "Office Party" policy, for example, would detail what is and isn't appropriate. It would remind employees that whilst they are at a social event, it is also a work event, and should be treated as such. If you combine this with a high level of communication outlining what is and is not appropriate you will hopefully have a problem free party.

Ensure that the party meets everyone's needs! By providing vegetarian options and alcohol free drinks everyone should feel welcome and able to enjoy themselves. Make sure the party is held somewhere neutral i.e. a venue which welcomes people of all religions and sexualities as this will enable people to feel secure and respected.

The most important recommendation, however, is that you deal with any aftermath of the party appropriately. If you are unfortunate enough to encounter some trouble or unhappiness between employees, don't brush it under the carpet! Too often employees feel that complaints regarding an office party aren't taken seriously, but you have a duty of care towards your employees to deal with any grievances or disciplinary issues with the same amount of seriousness and professionalism as you would under any other circumstance.

How Can We Help?

We can help provide you with any guidance or advice that you feel you would need on this subject. We could also provide and implement any policies you feel you may need such as an Office Party policy or a Relationships at Work policy. We are also available to offer assistance with any disciplinary or grievance investigations or meetings that you do not feel confident in conducting.

If you have any queries relating to any of the subjects raised within this newsletter then please don't hesitate to contact us at hradvice@hasslefreehr.co.uk