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Eleven Don'ts of Company Holiday Party Etiquette

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Whether you celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, or Epiphany, chances are you'll be invited to a company holiday party. Some professionals may tell you that this really isn't a time to relax—it's a time for networking, complimenting, and overall schmoozing. But they're wrong. And to help put you on the fast track to corporate success, I've developed a list of helpful recommendations. Naturally, you should adjust the list to fit your environment.

Head for the buffet line

When you first arrive at the party, bypass colleagues and clients on the way to the food. You'll have plenty of time for them later, and chances are the food will be free so you don't want to miss out. Also, say that you plan on getting your and your company's money's worth. Your company paid for the spread, and in today's economy, it's simply wrong to waste corporate funds.

Then complain about it

Naturally, the food will be catered, so even if it is a gastronomical delight, try to find something wrong with it. Then,

tell as many people as will listen. It'll impress your boss and upper management that you have exquisite culinary taste and an eye for detail.

Take advantage of the open bar

If you're lucky to work for a company that will pay for the alcohol as well as the food, be sure to drink up. Joke that you're buying drinks for everyone; the more often you say it, the funnier it gets. Again, your managers will be amazed at your ability to hold your liquor, not to mention the confidence that you seem to gain while drinking.

BYOB if it's a cash bar

If you work for a government contractor, medical institution, or any other facility that does not pay for alcoholic beverages at company functions, simply bring your own. Silver flasks are classy, but they simply don't hold enough. Fifths in the classic brown paper bag, on the other hand, will make a statement about your no-nonsense style. Bringing an entire gallon will make you friends.

Arrive late

Everyone knows that being late is fashionable. Holiday parties are an especially appropriate venue to show your social savvy. But do not come too late, because this will cut into your eating and drinking time.

Leave late

As with any party, always be the last to leave. It shows the host how much fun you're having. (And never mind any side comments that you should have left long ago.)

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If you feel too confident to drive, simply find a secluded area where you can sleep it off until the morning.

Talk down to lower level staffers

This is the perfect opportunity to throw your weight around. Ask subordinates to give up their seat when you approach, to get you food and drinks, to take a memo on something you're saying. They'll be impressed at your take-charge ability, even if you have no real authority at work.

Deride colleagues

If you've been at your job for a while you'll probably know quite a lot about your workmates. Use this time to tease them about professional limitations and personal flaws. If they recently failed in a project, bring it up—even if it happened long ago; they'll enjoy reminiscing with you. Bring their spouse and children into it too, if possible. It's a party after all, and everyone likes a joker.

Vent grievances

As the night progresses, approach supervisors and managers—even the CEO if available—to present any and all concerns with the job, the company, co-workers, and whatever

else comes to mind. You may not have another chance later, and they'll appreciate your candidness. If time permits, discuss your political and religious views as well. Seize this moment to “set the record straight.”

Dance with everyone who counts

Although you'll lose valuable complaining and criticizing time, you must dance to show your prowess on the linoleum. But choose as partners all of your superiors' spouses; if they decline, be persistent. Once you've forced them onto the dance floor, tell them about their significant other's little idiosyncrasies at work that they may not be privy to at home. And always, always lead.

If clients are present, share company secrets

The best way to keep your clients happy is to keep them in the loop. Divulge your

company's future strategies as well as any serious weaknesses. Attempt to change the relationship from client to friend. Clients will value the confidential information you've provided, and your company officials will treasure you for your information-gathering and disseminating ability.

There you have it. Eleven sure-fire ways of making your company holiday party one to remember!

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