



Throw a Great Holiday Party at Your Workplace — Without Spending a Bundle

Holding your holiday party at the office eliminates hassles and costs: No need to find a restaurant or venue that everyone likes, or organize transportation. But how can you make the event festive for employees when they're just a stone's throw away from their desks? Office managers surveyed by Staples Business Advantage® said that "trying to make the party special" when planning a party in the office adds another challenge on top of handling all the event details. Try these ideas for organizing a party that truly feels like a reward for employees — without creating a lot of stress for yourself.

Call for backup

Many party planners in Staples Business Advantage's informal survey said they struggle to get help with holiday events, so try the following ideas to enlist coworkers. Approach individuals directly with specific, manageable requests. They may be leery of a major time commitment, but they will be far more likely to contribute their time if they have a straightforward task with a deadline. Motivate volunteers with a tangible reward if you can — for example, dedicate a portion of your party budget to \$10 gift cards to a local coffee shop.

Redecorate for a festive feel

Rearrange the office furniture in your party room, put the lights on a dimmer setting, and build a playlist of background music. Music should create a lively atmosphere without overpowering conversation. Using playlists or stations from online music streaming services works well, but spend some time listening to them in advance to make sure they'll be festive and appropriate. Holiday decorations are easy to set up and will help complete the transformation. Remember that these decorations should make coworkers of all religious and cultural backgrounds feel included. Some people choose a variety of items to represent a broad range of traditions, but it may be easiest to stick with winter-themed décor such as strings of lights, garlands or wreaths.

Find a caterer that delivers outside the (pizza) box

Ideally, the money you saved by having the party on site means more funds can go toward serving up something special. Avoid workaday sandwiches, the usual pizza, or anything your office typically serves on site. Authentic international foods might be a refreshing change from the norm, or hiring a caterer to pass around appetizers can add a sense of occasion to the event. If you're considering trying a new caterer, make sure to get customer references. Ask the caterer exactly how much help they will provide for setup, serving and cleanup afterward, and what linens or other supplies will be provided.

Establish guidelines on alcohol

Alcohol is available at many parties, but your company must protect itself from potential liabilities — as well as the usual awkward office blunders. How will alcohol be served, and how can you encourage responsible behavior by employees? Raise these issues with your managers. Try to diplomatically remind them that their influence will help set the tone for the event, and their behavior before and during the party will signal to other employees what is appropriate. If it's in the budget, hiring a bonded bartender through a catering company can ease many concerns, as they'll be able to monitor consumption.

Be smart about scheduling

On-site parties work best when they're slotted for an afternoon or early evening near the end of the week. A weekday event lets employees transition right from work to party mode, and chances are everyone will be there — weekends fill up fast around the holidays, and it's hard to find one that will yield a decent turnout. If family members will be invited, a start time in the late afternoon or early evening makes it more likely that they will be able to join in.

Make gift giving fun and easy

Find a simple gift-giving game that doesn't require a lot of setup or planning. The most common — for good reason, as it's a classic — is a "white elephant" (sometimes known as a Yankee swap) where participants bring in low-cost but entertaining presents. Everyone takes a turn choosing an unopened gift from an anonymous grab bag with the option to trade with someone else who went before. If your budget allows, you might buy three bigger-ticket items — sports tickets or restaurant gift cards, for example — and enter everyone present into a drawing. Keep all gift-giving events voluntary so those who'd rather abstain don't feel pressured to join in.

Keep the points above in mind, and you'll find that bringing your holiday party right into the workplace lets you create a festive event on a budget. For your coworkers, the party is a welcome break from business as usual. They'll enjoy the celebration, and appreciate all you did behind the scenes to fill the office with good cheer.

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