

Scrooge here, on how to avoid the holiday party hangover

By Jodi R. Bohr

It's that time of year again. I, for one, am ready to bring on the holiday cheer, decorate, and listen to non-stop holiday music until my ears bleed. Why? Because it also means that I'll soon be watching my favorite Christmas movie, *Love Actually* (yes, it's considered a Christmas movie). And, as I get ready to dust off my DVD, I'm reminded of those cringe-worthy moments between Mia and Harry as they plan and attend their office holiday party.

Don't get me wrong, a holiday party is a wonderful way to acknowledge your staff, boost office morale, and bring seasonal cheer. Since employers may be subject to the same liability for the acts of their supervisors and employees during the holiday party as during working hours, allow me, with the help of Mia and Harry (movie quotes italicized), to provide you with some advice on avoiding a legal hangover.

"Right, the Christmas party. Not my favorite night of the year, and your unhappy

job to organize."

During the planning stage for the holiday party, employers should review the employment handbook, and if necessary, revise it to include acceptable standards of behavior at work-related social events. The policy should expressly state that employees are subject to the same anti-harassment policy at company sponsored events as they are while on the job.

Brief employees on party policies and appropriate conduct and educate supervisors on the proper handling of violations.

"I'll just be hanging around the mistletoe, hoping to be kissed."

Need I say it? Don't decorate with mistletoe.

Brand it a holiday party, not a Christmas party, and keep decorations secular. An employer who chooses to include religious decorations should be inclusive of all faiths.

"It's an art gallery, full of dark corners, for doing... dark deeds."

Consider inviting employees and their significant others to the event to keep inappropriate conduct at bay. Make sure the invitation is for "employee and guest," not



Alcohol is a contributing factor to a vast majority of holiday party lawsuit hangovers. Consider hiring a professional bartender and mandate that he or she check IDs to prevent underage drinking. Give the bartender the authority to determine when someone has had too much to drink.

Limit choices to beer and wine; do not serve hard alcohol and consider offering guests a fixed number of drink tickets to limit consumption. Serve a meal or make plenty of food available, so attendees are not drinking on an empty stomach. Remind employees to drink responsibly.

LEGAL EASE

"employee and spouse" to avoid treating unmarried employees differently. Also, make sure to secure an accessible venue that is available for all employees to attend and enjoy the event.

"Well, it's basic, really. Find a venue, over-order on the drinks, bulk-buy the guacamole and advise the girls to avoid Kevin . . ."

Bottom Line

Following this practical advice can help ensure that your party remains issue free. If you've already had your office party and need any advice regarding mistletoe related issues, contact counsel right away to mitigate those issues. I'm off to my holiday party now.

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