

## Don't undo your good work at the office party

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Sunday, November 30, 2008  
11/30/2008 4:00:08 AM

Despite the tighter economy, there still are plenty of companies planning to hold holiday office parties.

Which means there will be plenty of opportunities for employees to do some career damage, if they are not careful.

Ostensibly, the holiday party is a way for businesses to thank workers and celebrate the year. Depending on the budget, these gatherings can range from cookies and soft drinks in the break room to lavish catered events at local hotels.

No matter what the venue or dress code, though, it's a good idea to watch your eggnog consumption and remember that this is not a weekend tailgate event.

I've heard plenty of horror stories about holiday parties gone awry, ranging from assaults and property destruction to inappropriate romantic overtures and ill-advised attempts to finally "set the boss straight" about a few things.

No wonder some companies have banned alcohol from these gatherings.

Whether spirits are present or not, be aware that you may be judged on your performance at the buffet table just as much as you are behind the desk.

Rachel Wagner, who owns Tulsa-based Rachel Wagner Etiquette and Protocol, recently sent me the following tips for merry-makers:

**RSVP.** Whether your invitation is the traditional print type or an electronic version, it's important to respond promptly by phoning the number given or e-mailing to the address listed. Then, honor your commitment.

**Make an appearance.** Though attendance may be optional, showing up shows respect to your boss and loyalty to your company. Stay for at least an hour or two, but don't be the last to leave.

**Meet and greet.** Circulate and get to know co-workers from other departments and floors. Introduce yourself and your guest. Make small talk by asking others about their holiday plans. Avoid talking shop or sharing office gossip.

**Dress appropriately.** An office party is still a professional event; attire should reflect what is work-appropriate. Holiday apparel can be festive, but women should avoid outfits that are too revealing.

**Maintain professionalism.** Don't let your guard down. An open bar is not an invitation for careless imbibing. Avoid conduct that compromises your professionalism, or for which you might need to apologize the next day at work.

**Show appreciation.** Before you leave, locate your hosts, thank them and say goodbye. To stand out even more, send a handwritten thank-you note the next day.

So, unless you want to risk a career move to the North Pole, I'd suggest following Wagner's advice.

I hear Santa can be a real taskmaster.