

Holiday Parties that Won't Break Your BUDGET

We know that the holidays are fast approaching. We're all watching our pennies, but that doesn't mean that we can't host a holiday party for employees and still keep it all in the budget!

However limited your party budget, it will serve you well to show your appreciation for your workers' year-long efforts in some tangible and merry-making manner; to celebrate together in a social rather than business atmosphere. This goes a long way toward making workers feel valued and helps them bond with one another, a good step toward teambuilding and improving morale.

That's why we brainstormed on how you can host a party and still save. There is a way to party hardy and have a great time if you follow some simple rules.

Simplicity equals elegance. If you want to throw a fun soiree but worry about managing costs, gather up and listen.

Whether you hold your holiday party on or off company premises, there are many ways for you and your employees to have a frolicking good time without "breaking the bank."

Here are 20 great Cost Effective Tips to having a Budget Friendly Company Holiday Party.

1. Start planning now. Everyone knows the key to saving money is to plan ahead and be organized. Now is the time to decide what type of party you'd like. Do you want to have a dinner party at a big fancy ballroom or an informal get together at the office? Think about your guest list. Will employee's spouses be attending? Keeping the party on the smaller side is more than likely going to save you money. Do you want to provide everything, or do you want to go potluck?

2. Set the date immediately. "Premium" days in the month of December quickly fill up on Caterer's calendars.

3. At-the-office mid-week Luncheons. A catered luncheon at the office can be less expensive than a restaurant or banquet outing. Catered foods range in cost and many caterers themselves have a number of menus with a range of selections and prices. Since this is during the work day, it goes without saying it's for employees only, so the guest count would not be as high as if it were an evening event. There would also be additional savings by not having any alcohol.

4. At-the-office mid-week Afternoon Mixers. Instead of Lunch, host a mixer from 4pm-6pm with light finger foods and beverages. Invite employee's spouses to join for a family atmosphere. Bring in a multi-disc player sound system and play some popular holiday CD's, or tune your company radio to a local station that plays non-stop holiday music. Take some party photos of employees and display them on your company bulletin board. Consider playing some lighthearted holiday games or activities to add some fun to the festivities.

5. Have a "Dessert Bake Off" contest. Not everyone bakes, but those who do, usually love to share their goods with friends. Make it a team effort (and alleviate your financial burden) by asking them to bring a favorite dessert to share. Make scorecards by each dessert and the winner gets a gift certificate, or a paid day off, or lunch with the boss or ???

6. Off premises parties. Invite your employees and their "significant others" to the Bosses home. At-home holidays parties have a "warm and cozy" feel to them, and can make socializing more comfortable and enjoyable. Holding a party at your home can also be a little easier on the wallet than a restaurant or banquet hall party. Whether you serve brunch, lunch, dinner or cocktails, be sure the quality and taste of the food and drink is superior; this will add considerably to the party experience. Because it is at a private home, you would also be able to furnish your own alcohol and not have the added expense of a bartender, just be sure to consult with your insurance company regarding liquor liability. Most policies have a nominal charge to add this type of coverage for an event at your residence.

7. Have the Caterer just Drop it off. Instead of having the expense of a wait staff and bartenders. Just have the Caterer bring everything, set it up, then leave. Arrange for them to come back and pick up their equipment on the next regular business day will keep delivery costs to a minimum.

8. The Big Party. If you do choose to go "whole hog," and hold your party at a banquet hall, there are some ways to hold down costs. Parties held on any day but Friday or Saturday are generally less expensive.

9. Have a "wintertime" party in January or February when rates may also be cheaper.

10. Ordering from the menu saves money. For many Caterers, their Chefs carefully plan menus to inspire, stay balanced, and with a specific budget in mind. When starting from scratch, often times, a great idea becomes much larger of a process to execute than planned. This creates additional expense to the Caterer and therefore is passed on to the client.

11. Do your best to get an accurate head count rather than paying unnecessary additional monies for "no-shows." Plan quantities carefully. Calculate how many guests you have and plan for that many. You may be likely to end up trashing leftovers, so try not to buy more than you will need.

12. Buffets are usually cheaper than sit-down dinners.

13. Have a cash bar or give out a designated number of drink tickets to each guest. Once employees use up their tickets, they'll need to pay for additional drinks themselves.

14. Serve appetizers by hand. People are less likely to waste food this way. If you just put food out on a table and give them plates they tend to fill up the plate but don't eat it all. If you have servers walk around with trays they are more likely to eat what they take.

15. What about the drinks? Providing your own drinks as well as going non-alcoholic can save you a lot of money. So can mixing up punch where you're using a large ratio of juice/soda/sparkling water to alcohol. If you've received bottles of wine through out the year that you haven't used. If you're serving alcohol be prepared to take keys and call cabs if necessary. In this day and age you can be held responsible if someone drinks at your party and has an accident driving home.

16. Instead of spending a ton of money on decorations, see what you can find in your house first. Get creative and try to spruce up stuff you already have. A simple glass bowl can look a bit more festive by lining it with colored cellophane or plastic wrap, for example. Also, don't go overboard with what you do purchase. A couple of decorations can go a long way.

17. Use a theme. Having a theme helps you focus on what you buy. If you focus on a particular theme and stick to it, you won't waste money on things that don't fit that theme.

18. Plan a Potluck. It's the oldest tradition of Thanksgiving I can think of, really!

19. Do nothing.

20. Crash someone else's party! Seriously. Many associations have holiday parties that allow you to bring your employees as long as you pay thier way. This makes great sense for smaller companies to not only have a very upscale and elegant atmosphere for thier party, but is also a great way to network.

The holidays should be a festive and fun time, a time of good will and as much generosity as one can muster. With this in mind, reward your employees with a joyful holiday party as a tangible way to express your appreciation for their yearlong efforts. And leave that bah-humbugging to someone else.

Whatever you do to celebrate the holidays this season, keep these tips in mind for your next party, and you can throw a successful one without much cash. Happy holidays!

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