



Feature

## Office Party Etiquette

By Judith Earley

**A senior partner's retirement. The annual holiday bash. No matter what the occasion, remember that a work party is still all about business. You may be on the fast track to a full partnership today; but after an evening of putting not only the hors d'oeuvres, but also your foot into your mouth, your promising career can be derailed in a hurry.**



Believe it or not, there actually are many people who enjoy getting to know their co-workers on a social level. And there are others who would rather have a root canal. No matter which group you happen to fall into, there are certain fundamental rules of etiquette that can make you a successful guest at any

office gathering. As the big night approaches, bear in mind the following guidelines:

### 1. To go or not to go

Attendance is not an option. Don't even think about skipping the event unless you or a loved one is at death's door. Whether you like it or not, the office party is an important part of your job. If you absolutely are not the party-animal type, try approaching the evening as you would a business meeting. Grin and bear it.

### 2. What not to wear

Keep in mind that this is not a night on the town or a party at your best friend's house. While you certainly want to look your best and your outfit should be appropriately cheerful, your choice of clothing for the party should be as tasteful as what you would opt to wear to work. You should save the sexy, tight-fitting ensemble for a different type of occasion.

### 3. Strangers in the night

Chances are that there will be quite a few people in attendance whom you have not met, for example, your co-workers' dates or spouses. Decide beforehand that you will be the one who makes them feel welcome. Be sure to smile, say hello, and make small talk with as many guests as you can

outside of your regular set of work friends. If you do, you will make a better impression on everyone and have a better time in the process.

### 4. Why don't you stay just a little bit longer

Even if you are not thrilled to be there, stay at the party long enough to see and be seen by your immediate supervisors and the guest of honor, if there is one. If you stay less than an hour, it will be obvious to all that you really didn't want to come. If it turns out that you are having a great time after all, still try to leave half an hour before the scheduled end time; otherwise, as business etiquette expert Lydia Ramsey puts it, "You just might find yourself on the cleaning crew."

### 5. Going solo

Just because you don't want to go out alone, don't take it upon yourself to invite a guest unless it specifically says on the invitation that guests are welcome. No matter how successful the firm, there is a budget to consider. Plus, you don't want to put your guest in the uncomfortable position of being the only non-employee there. And always, always, always double-check to make sure that it is a family gathering before you bring your children.

### 6. Eat, drink, and be merry

Consider that the free food is not an invitation to fill up in lieu of eating dinner. Also, because alcohol plus business rarely equals success, bear in mind that less is more. Something that you say or do under the influence now can result in the loss of a raise or a promotion down the road—or even worse, the loss of your reputation. Think of that as your most valuable asset, and do all you can to preserve it.



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Flirting, touching, and gossiping are always inappropriate. The best way to avoid the embarrassment and regret of tomorrow is to keep your wits about you today.

Saint Augustine once said, "Complete abstinence is easier than perfect moderation." So, if you think there is even a chance that you might overdo it, don't do it at all.

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