

It's the time of the year for merry-making and your boss wants you to organise the office's best bonding party ever. Easier said than done. The to-do list stretches as long as the guest list. The decisions are mind-boggling — budget, deadlines, decorations, choice of colours, Christmas gifts, food, drinks, games.

And even if you are merely a partaker of the fun, bear in mind that there is proper etiquette to be followed at office parties.

Ms Maureen Tseng, director of client services at The Hoffman Agency, a public relations firm, and Ms Shee Shuh Ying of The Percy Institute of International Protocol told *Recruit* about the should-haves and must-dos at any office party:

#### Be clear about your objectives

You will want your Christmas party to be remembered for more than your eggnog, turkey and gifts. So set an objective. Ms Tseng said such parties are just what the doctor would prescribe for the waning spirits and drooping morale of employees. If you are not certain of the objective, clarify with your boss as this will help you plan the most appropriate kind of party.

#### The budget

A more-than-decent budget will get you hotel catering, party planning consultants and great entertainment, among many other things — a dream come true for any office party.

But reality may dictate that you work with a very modest budget. And when that happens, round up your colleagues. Encourage them to dig into their pockets to provide enough for a meal and entertainment. This should not be painfully difficult, if you are sensitive enough to think about what people can afford and careful enough to

# Party on!

It's your turn to organise the office party. ADAM KOH susses out tips to help you plan one that will be a roaring success.



get your boss to endorse your request to your colleagues.

#### Think up a theme

Coming up with a "knock-em-dead" theme is a great first step in planning any party, said Ms Tseng, who has organised functions ranging from media parties to classy cocktails. A good way of livening up party spirits is using familiar communications materials to capture the "mood" of the Christmas season and office party.

This could be invitation cards done on a special edition of your office newsletter, or you can send a lively e-mail to everyone. Always make sure your theme is appropriate for your company. Anything outlandish may not go well with your boss.

OCBC Bank, for instance, is holding its annual dinner and dance at Suntec Singapore tomorrow, and has created a buzz among its 3,000 employees by inviting Adrian Pang and Michelle Chia, two favourite personalities from Channel U's *Yummy King*, to host the event. The dinner and dance is free for employees.

#### Stick to the checklist and timeline

Needless to say, the checklist will be seemingly endless — from deciding on the venue and logistics to entertainment and decorations. Regardless of how many more items you may add as you go along, remember always to assign tasks early and stick to the deadlines, advised Ms Tseng. Work backwards from the date of the Christmas party. This way, you will know what needs to be done and when.

#### Choosing your attire

Dressing is the only pre-party preparation everyone gives some thought to because no one wants to be remembered as the wannabe Christmas tree at the office party. Make sure the dress code is clearly

stated in the invitation. As a rule of thumb, it is safer not to make the requirement too casual.

#### Conversation skills

Almost everyone who has stood facing the boss at such functions will remember the unnerving awkwardness of the situation. Use this opportunity to talk about more personal matters, said Ms Shee, but always keep a sense of respect for your superiors.

It never is wrong to behave naturally at parties, but be mindful that you are at an office party and not out with your group of friends. Do let your hair down, but watch the alcohol, too. And a gentle reminder: Religion, sex and politics are taboo topics. So stick to the script like holiday plans or resolutions and you may just have something, other than awkwardness, to take away with you from the conversation.

#### Eat, drink and be merry

"Never take more than you feel you can comfortably eat," pointed out Ms Shee. It's important to know your limits. Choose a "softer" drink if you know alcohol turns you into Mr Hyde, and do not be afraid to decline the offer — just be polite when you do. Good manners never hurt anyone, and as Ms Shee aptly put it: "Table manners still matter and are an important component, because somewhere, somehow, someone will be watching you and checking on your business and social skills."

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