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Say yes to the holiday party, but remember the big picture

Still have a holiday office party at your place of employment? Count yourself lucky. But remember that while the pretense is pleasure, you also need to approach such affairs with a professional plan that includes both appearance and attitude.

First, remember that even if the boss doesn't say so, attendance is mandatory.

"In these days of advanced technology, nothing beats face-to-face interactions in a relaxed setting," says Mona Euler, vice president for IU Health Neuroscience. "Employees who want to move up in their respective company should attend."

The office party provides a minefield of potential complications.

"Using inappropriate language, consuming too much alcohol, or leaving little to the imagination in your choice of attire (men and women both) will derail your career quickly," says Liz Snyder, vice president of human resources for Damar Services Inc.

Dress according to the season and the location. Keep in mind that this is your opportunity to dress more in line with your own style—it isn't a costume party. If it fits your style, you can wear sequins on a tasteful top or a matching tie and handkerchief in a bold color.

I've seen some amazing long-sleeve cocktail dresses



that are stunning, when worn in the right size and with appropriate heels. If your party will be more casual, a layered cardigan look with a fun blouse paired with boots is a great option. Remember, though, that it's still a business event, not a hot date or a night out at a dance club.

Show them that, even at a party, you're ready to form new connections (the office-appropriate kind, of course) and present yourself well.

And use these tips:

1. Choose fashions that fit and flatter your body type. Keep skin to a minimum.
2. Let accessories like your cuff links, earrings, watch, clutch purse or necktie do the talking.
3. Be beverage-savvy. Anything beyond two drinks starts to test your inhibitions and self-awareness.
4. Know your list of people you need to meet. What questions do you have? What do

you have in common with them? Establish a connection for a follow-up coffee.

5. Keep work-related discussion to a minimum and learn something about each person you spend time with. Remember, everyone is important. Show them you can arrive appropriately, have engaging conversations, and still have fun. Know which of your interests and hobbies you can discuss easily. Think of examples that show you're a well-rounded and balanced professional.

6. As painful as it might be, turn off or at least silence your tech gadgets. If it's the baby sitter, take the call, but defer on the rest. Be present.

7. Have a strategy for remembering names. Acknowledging people by their name makes them feel special and shows you are in the moment.

8. Spouses and guests can become your biggest advocate if you make the right impression. Include them in conversations.

If in doubt about anything, think about how many times the office-party story will get told, repeated and exaggerated. It's tough to recover your hard-earned reputation.

Oh, and don't forget to have fun. •



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