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# The Gig

With Nadira A. Hira

NOVEMBER 30, 2007, 12:58 PM

## Surviving the holiday party

With December officially here, Monday marks the beginning of that most dangerous of times — holiday party season. For the geniuses among us, this will be the chance to show your best side — that witty, charming, well-dressed person you usually leave at home — and get a little work done at the same time. (What better place to do some low-key relationship-building than the company party?) But for everyone else, the holiday party can be a veritable minefield: What to wear, what if anything to drink, which folks to engage, which to avoid at all costs, and the list goes on. So we enlisted the help of a few experts to answer our questions and ensure that this year's company party experience is your best — and, more importantly, not your last.

- **Dress to impress (your boss, not that hot number at the club).** The office party may be a party, but the key word for our purposes is “office.” Treat your holiday party like any other professional event, says [Mary Crane](#), whom you may remember from *60 Minutes*' Gen Y piece. The lobbyist turned assistant White House chef turned business coach — herself a Yer in spirit — cautions against outfits that are too revealing, obviously bedazzled, or play music. (That last one should be obvious, but Crane points to the gentlemen who insist on wearing those bow ties that play “Jingle Bells.” We're laughing at you, guys.) If the party is directly after work, Crane recommends wearing the same clothes you wore to the office — lest one appear to be trying too hard — and says business casual is fine for off-site, weekend holiday events. And if formal attire is specified, gentlemen should go with a tux. As for ladies, they “may wear a formal-length or cocktail-length dress. They should, however, avoid any dress that will reveal more cleavage or leg than would normally be revealed at work (forget those thigh-high slits). And ladies, please do not pull ‘a Britney.’ At all times, wear appropriate undergarments.” Sage advice, to say the least.
- **Drink like it's dinner at Grandma's, not happy hour.** Get sloppy at the office party, and you'll probably regret it on Monday, if not forever. And that's the kind of infamy you don't need. But we've had this talk before: “[How much is too much at happy hour?](#)”
- **Do NOT show the love.** A few drinks in, and everyone starts looking like your own personal Brad Pitt or Angelina Jolie. But resist the urge! As Stephanie Losee and Helaine Olen, the authors of *Office Mate: The Employee Handbook for Finding—and Managing—Romance on the Job*, have a few thoughts on this one: Don't use the holiday party to hit on a colleague, to make out with a colleague, or to go home with a colleague. The overarching theme is fairly simple: No romance at the office party. (Even those who're already openly together should think twice about excess smishing; your coworkers don't appreciate the gross-out.)
- **Mix, mingle, and be interesting!** The office party is a chance to talk to all the folks you don't interact with every day, so take advantage of the opportunity. Crane encourages keeping the conversation light and social, and choosing topics you might conceivably discuss during office hours, such as holiday plans. And while the office party can be a good time to get to know a colleague you particularly respect, or to chat with your managers about what you're working on, be sure to keep it *casual*. As the *Office Mate* authors put it, “Your boss is there to relax with colleagues, not fend off requests for raises or juicy assignments or—heaven forbid—advances from a subordinate who has decided the time is right to reveal a long-simmering crush.”
- **Don't close the place.** Everyone agrees on this point. Nothing says lame like being the last one to leave.

And there you have it. We'll hear more from Mary Crane in the coming weeks — about holiday gift-giving and cards — and in the meantime, check out her comments in yesterday's *New York Times* story, “[What Do I Do? Depends on What Week It Is.](#)” It's a fun Gen Y career story about [oneweekjob.com](#) specifically and Yers' fickle career tendencies generally. Have a great weekend!

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Another good tip for company Christmas parties is to not just sit with the other young people in your company. It's very common for the new hires and interns to group together and ignore all the other folks, other than their direct bosses.

Posted By Eric, Toronto, Ontario : December 3, 2007 9:35 pm