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[ From Lansing State Journal ]

**Mingle carefully with co-workers**

Etiquette expert tells us how to keep self respect

By Anne Erickson  
Lansing State Journal

The holiday season brings many once-a-year happenings: crack-of-dawn department store sales, chilled eggnog, unavoidable mistletoe.

And then there's the holiday office party.

While loosening up at the year's party might seem like a fun idea, Julie Duke of Protocol Consulting Group in Okemos warns that going too far could cost you respect.

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"I think people have to understand that the office party is not any different than any other day that they're in the office," said Duke, who is a certified protocol and etiquette consultant.

"Supervisors and CEOs are there, watching what is going on. It's about moderation and control so you don't feel terrible the next day about what you said or did."

Here are some rules for those who want to avoid being the main topic at the water cooler the day after the shindig.

**No. 1: Clothing should still be professional**

"Since we conform to a dress code during the day, some see the office party as an opportunity to really show themselves and their tastes off, and that's probably not the best idea," Duke said. "You work every day trying to create a professional image in the office, and you don't want to undo all that in one event."

Yes, ladies, that means anything tight, low-cut or (damn!) too short stays in the closet.

"It's just not wise to push the envelope with people who make day-to-day decisions about the progress of your business," Duke said.

It's a tad simpler for men, with Duke giving kudos to a classic suit and tie.

**No. 2: Overindulging at the bar is a no-no**

No matter how tempting the open bar appears, never overdo it.

"The biggest mistake I think people make at the office party is they drink too much," Duke said. "There is no justification whatsoever for becoming intoxicated and not maintaining professional behavior."

**No. 3: Network, talk with the higher-ups**

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(Photo by NBC)

Two office parties: In a special one-hour Christmas episode, Michael sends out an inappropriate Christmas card which lands him in hot water with his girlfriend, Carol. Meanwhile, tensions mount on the party-planning committee among Angela, Pam and Karen. The fallout leaves the office with two competing Christmas parties. The episode airs at 8 p.m. Thursday on Channel 10 (NBC).

**More office party don'ts**

» Don't treat the office party like a singles bar. An office party gives you a chance to see another side of your co-workers.

» Don't flirt or act in a sexually provocative manner.

» Don't wear suggestive clothing. It is OK to wear more festive clothing (sparkles or sequins), but if you wouldn't wear it to the office, you shouldn't wear it to the office party.

» Don't let your guard down. Relax at office parties, but don't reveal things about yourself that you might not want your co-workers to know.

» Don't tell dirty or off-color jokes.

» Don't underestimate the importance of your guest's behavior. Invite someone who will behave appropriately.

Source: Detroit Free Press 2006, cited from Dawn Rosenberg McKay, *www.about.com's Guide to Career Planning*

**Do's and Don'ts for holiday mingling**

If you're dreading the holiday office party or attending one more open house and small talk doesn't come naturally to you, consider creating your own "Do's and Don'ts" cheat sheet, suggests Debra Fine, author of *The Fine Art of Small Talk: How to Start a Conversation, Keep it Going, Build Networking Skills - and Leave a Positive Impression!* Save it in your blazer pocket or handbag. The cheat sheet includes:

**DON'T:** Wait to be properly introduced. Are you waiting for your grandmother from St. Louis to arrive and make the "proper" introductions?

**DO:** Take the risk introduce yourself and be the first to say "Hello!" Act as if you're the host and introduce new arrivals to

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Use the party as an opportunity to advance.

"In the work environment today, everyone has amazing skills. Very often what sets you apart from everyone else is doing your job is the way that you interact with people," said Duke. "So the office party is a great chance for people who are not high up in the business culture to meet the VIPs and CEOs."

Duke suggests simply smiling, extending your hand for a firm handshake and introducing yourself and the people with you in a way that's comfortable and confident.

"It makes people think, 'Wow, that's a pulled-together person,'" Duke said.

**No. 4: Know how to introduce professionally**

Know how to introduce your partner. When introducing your date to the higher-ups, proceed with the following:

Correct: "Mr. Smith, may I please introduce TO YOU my date, Kevin Archer."

Incorrect: "Mr. Smith, may I please introduce YOU TO my date, Kevin Archer."

We know what you're thinking - what's the big deal?

"It may not make a lot of difference today, but someday you will be with someone who will know you did it the wrong way," Duke said.

**No. 5: Avoid discussing controversial topics**

Don't talk trash.

At the party, all those big rules that your mom told you when you were little stay true. No heavy talk of politics, money or religion. And don't talk about people behind their backs or use foul language.

"The safest things to talk about are current affairs, or a trick that I like is to admire something about the person with whom I'm speaking," Duke said. "That gives the person a chance to begin to talk about themselves. And people love to talk about themselves."

"Just asking questions shows that you're interested in the other person and not completely self-centered," she added, "and that makes it a better party for everyone."


**No. 6: Respect others and have a good time**

Above all: Have fun!

Duke says to keep in mind a few rules about being civil and respectful of the people you're with.

"The more you learn to move in a room and mingle and circulate, the better you become at it, and the more you enjoy doing it. And what makes a party fun is getting around and meeting all the people you might not work with, and talking about something not focused on work."

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your conversational partner or partners.

DON'T: Be uncertain and wait for the other person to extend their hand.

DO: Smile first and always shake hands when you meet anyone unless they are prohibited by religion or culture.

DON'T: Rush through introductions.

DO: Take your time! Make an extra effort to remember names, and use the names frequently in the conversation.

DON'T: Look around the room to see what is being served at the buffet table or who has just walked through the door.

DO: Maintain eye contact. People don't feel listened to if you're not looking at them.

DON'T: Get easily distracted by party noise and activities.

DO: Listen carefully for information that can keep the conversation going. Give verbal cues that you are following along: Say "That sounds interesting ..." or "What happened next?"

DON'T: Give one word answers and fall into a conversation rut.

DO: Play the conversation "game." When someone asks, "How's are you?" or "What's going on?" answer with more than: "Pretty good." and "Not much." Tell more about yourself so that others can learn more about you: "We just implanted flex time at our facility so it has been a huge adjustment." Or "My son is joining me for winter break from his first year at college."

DON'T: Put your foot in your mouth.

DO: Be careful with acquaintances. You wouldn't want to open a conversation with: "How's your job at (fill in the blank)?" What if that person just got fired or laid off? Be careful when you're asking about an acquaintance's spouse or special friend: you could regret it.

DON'T: Become an F.B.I. agent. Questions like: "What do you do?" "Are you married?" "Do you have children?" and "Where are you from?" lead to dead end conversations. Do use open ended questions such as: "Tell me about your holiday plans." or "What got you interested in architecture?"

DO: Use open ended questions such as: "Tell me about your holiday plans." or "What got you interested in architecture?"

DON'T: Exhibit negative body language

DO: Pay heed to your body language. Nervous or ill-at-ease people make others uncomfortable. Act confident and comfortable, even when you're not. Appear approachable by standing up straight and smiling.

DON'T: Enter an open house, party or get together unprepared.

DO: Spend a few minutes before an anticipated event preparing to talk easily about three topics. Remind yourself what you already know about the people you expect to interact with. This will come in handy when you find yourself in the middle of an awkward moment...or seated at a table of eight where people are playing with their food.

DON'T: Melt away from conversation.

DO: Show appreciation and exit gracefully. Make a positive impression by shaking hands and saying goodbye as you leave.

Every conversation is an opportunity for success. If you keep take the risk to meet and show an interest in new people you will gain new relationships, enjoy lively conversations, and just possibly come away with some new business.

*Source: Debra Fine lives in Denver and works nationwide as a speaker and trainer. She is the author of The Fine Art of Small Talk (Hyperion). For additional tips and information visit her Web site at [www.DebraFine.com](http://www.DebraFine.com).*

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