

Respecting Diversity at the Holidays



Handling religious holidays in the workplace can be a sensitive issue. Whether your company has a party attended by employees and significant others, a group outing, or a casual potluck meal, celebrating holidays in the workplace should be a fun, stress-free event that involves everyone. The way your organization celebrates holidays reflects the way people are treated in your workplace year-round. An inclusive holiday celebration helps build a positive work environment that fosters employee engagement, teamwork, and enjoyment. In order to make this a reality, it is important to respect diversity in the workplace.

Consider these tips for creating an inclusive seasonal celebration:

1. Respect diversity. Be sensitive to a culturally and religiously diverse workplace. This means celebrating secular events, versus religious events. For example, celebrate the general holiday season or winter solstice, rather than Christmas, Hanukkah, or Kwanzaa. This will avoid any hurt feelings or resentment for religions or beliefs that are not recognized. Creating a respectful workplace will ultimately foster trust—the necessary foundation for a positive work environment.



Religious Holidays

If you prefer to leave religion out of the workplace, you may refuse to allow decorations for any religious holiday. It may be your preference to only observe personal milestones, such as birthdays, weddings, or retirements. Whatever your policy, it is imperative that it be applied equally and without bias.

If it is your organization's practice to celebrate religious holidays, you may wish to allow one of these decoration options:

- You may allow all employees to decorate, bring in treats, etc. This policy must be applied equally for all faiths.
- You may purchase decorations for all religious holidays. As an employer, you will have more control, but it is important to recognize different beliefs.

2. Be mindful. Employers need to watch out for the best interests of their employees. This responsibility ranges from creating a safe workplace to creating a respectful one. In order to encourage employees to be mindful of other cultures and beliefs, your company should set the expectation. Make employees aware that you expect them to act with courtesy, kindness, and equality toward others in the workplace. Lead by example by treating others as you would wish to be treated.
3. Celebrate big and small events. Form a party planning committee of interested individuals. Ideally, this group will be composed of employees from all levels of the organization and with diverse backgrounds. The holiday season is a great opportunity to encourage team building and boost employee morale. Ideas that encourage working together—even fun competition—may include a cookie bake-off, ugly sweater day, or decoration contest. Other ways to encourage togetherness include making a charitable contribution or hosting a potluck party. Ask your employees what activities they would enjoy. The bottom line is that celebrating together helps promote feelings of unity, happiness, and inclusion.

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Building Relationships

Do not let the stress of the holiday season interfere with the way you interact with your colleagues. Focus on building positive work relationships by communicating courteously and valuing diversity. Make it your priority to treat others as you would like to be treated, and expect the same in return. Remember that although your co-workers' holiday customs may be different than your own, they are equally important to the individuals who practice them. No matter what your team does to celebrate holidays, you will all benefit from a workplace that is respectful and inclusive year-round.

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