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Business Insight: The right way to get noticed at holiday parties

Think ahead, think smartly to create a good impression.



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Nancy Karas, a senior career coach with the placement service The Five O'Clock Club, says how you conduct yourself at holiday events can have a big impact on your career — for better or worse.

How can company holiday parties be a key networking event?

They give you a chance to meet people to whom you may not otherwise have access. The settings are more relaxed and the mood is more festive. This is an ideal time for you to step forward and shine.

What kind of homework should be done before the big day?

Identify the people you'd like to meet. Find out as much as you can about them. This information can be used to break the ice and make connections. You want to create bonds and build trust, paving the way for building relationships. This is not the time to whip out your resume. For now, make some connections.

How can an employee be noticed in the right way at the holiday event?

You can destroy your career or give it a boost. Get noticed, but for the right reasons. Starting with:

The approach • Smile and shake hands firmly. This demonstrates you are comfortable interacting with others. Mention something you know will be a common bond. If the person serves on the board of directors of a not-for-profit organization, express your interest in the organization if appropriate — and perhaps your willingness to be a volunteer.

Be prepared • Keep the conversation focused on the other person, rather than on yourself. But you don't want to get caught off-guard. Although it's not good to come on too strong, prepare a two-minute pitch about yourself, just in case you are asked about your career goals.

Meet the movers and the shakers • This doesn't mean the people wearing lampshades, with cocktails in each hand. Those movers and shakers will have regrets in the morning — and, chances are, they are not top management. When you make your people-to-meet list, choose the successful decision makers, those who make things happen — and from whom you can learn.

Find a way to help • You want to be perceived as a resource. You may be able to act as a networking, referral or information source. It's always easier to ask for help for

yourself from people who already appreciate your help.

Dress for success • It's an office party, so stick with business attire. Don't wear anything you would wear to a club or bar or at the beach. You will always do your best networking when you are well dressed.

Follow-up • The ball is in your court. Smart networking means following up to maintain new connections. Make notes and send emails within a day or two.

What to avoid on that festive night?

Alcohol can mean ruin, so stick with sparkling water.

Reputations and careers can implode "under the influence." After a few drinks, one woman — who was always very proper at work — was on the dance floor with her skirt hiked up, dancing cheek-to-cheek with a guy from accounting she barely knew. He was gyrating and trying to do splits. The smartphone videos were circulating within minutes. Everyone watched in horror — not just those who were at the party. Don't be that person.

Dawn House

dawn@sltrib.com

Twitter: @DawnHouseTrib Nancy Karas, business coach

