

All Eyes on You at the Holiday Party, Even Unwanted Ones

Dear Stephen,

It's that time of year again when our company has its annual Christmas party. Oh excuse me, "holiday party." My company invites us out for a night during the week. Usually, the event is at a nice restaurant, and it's a heavy hors d'oeuvres, light buffet type affair. Very generous, very nice. My company has grown over the years, so we went from having the party in-house to going to a restaurant for a sit-down dinner. We are now too big for that (and no one really wants a sit-down holiday party, anyway) so we have a private room event. On occasion the bosses have taken over an A-list place in our city to throw a fancier event. It's always a nice time, but there is now a thorn in the rosebush that makes these parties painful.

For the last two years, we have been told we can invite a guest. Most people bring their husbands, wives or partners of either sex, no issue there. For me, however, the whole concept has made the event sort of a drag. As it turns out, for both of the last two years I was single and sort of dating someone,

but did not feel like I wanted to bring them. If I do bring a date, I have to explain to everyone I work with who I am with, and it's not so simple for whoever I'm dating at the time either because I don't want to send them the wrong message.

If I don't bring a date, it's trouble, too. I am an attractive woman in my early 30s. There is an always an open bar at the party and people inevitably get drunk. The boss gets us all Ubers, so people tend to over drink (I learned the hard way not to drink too much at these events). Now that people bring husbands, wives, boyfriends and girlfriends, when I come alone, I feel like the wives of some of my male co-workers are giving me the "once over," like I'm the office single girl trying to steal their men. Nothing can be farther from the truth.

Should I just bring a date to deal with the partners, even if it makes the party a drag, or should I just go by myself and subject myself to that look?

Sexy, Single, and Wanting to Mingle, but Not Like That



You can send your workplace questions to Stephen at: StephenSays@bellow.press.

Questions selected to be answered, will appear in this column. Please use the Subject: Stephen Says for all emails. Stephen Viscusi is a bestselling author, television personality, and CEO of The Viscusi Group, global executive recruiters located in New York. Follow Stephen on Twitter @WorkplaceGuru, Like Stephen on Facebook; and follow him on LinkedIn.

Dear Sexy and Single,

Wow, young lady, you have a healthy ego! But before I get to that, what's your problem with calling it a "holiday party"? Unless you work at the Vatican, everyone calls them holiday parties nowadays. I won't belabor the point, but this is not the hill to die on, and that sort of snark is sure to get you some more unwanted looks.

On the topic of unwanted looks, you shouldn't worry so much. I don't doubt how attractive you are or that these looks are real, but if you are as innocent as

you say you are then what else can you do? Now, if there really is something for some of these wives and girlfriends to worry about, then that is a different story.

That you had the idea of bringing someone just to avoid some side-eyed glances makes me think you are not getting as much attention as you really think you are. The parties are meant to be a place for everyone to have fun and relax a little, do whatever will allow you to have the best time. Heck, even if you have a partner, it might be more fun if you leave them at home.

Either way, I have a couple of do's and don'ts for every holiday party that are worth reviewing this time of year. First, and the question I am asked most often, is what do you wear to the party? The answer, and it applies to both men and women, is that it is a party, and you want to show off your yoga body or flat belly, but it is still a work party. It's great to have fun, but you still want to look (and act) like a professional, whether or not spouses or dates are invited. Some companies start their parties immediately after the workday so people don't have time to go home and change. Even if your company has yet to catch on to this trick, wearing what you wore to work that day is always a safe bet. Now, I am not saying don't look good, by all means choose your best outfit for

that day, but just think of it as an extension of your office.

Second and most importantly, do not get too drunk. I know everyone is tired of being told not to over drink, and it seems so obvious, but if it were so obvious then why does it keep happening so much? The rules are not the same for everyone either. The boss is allowed to over drink, but you are not. It might not be fair, but it really is that simple.

Holiday parties rarely cost people their jobs, but they definitely have cost people promotions. Later in your career, when the boss has to decide whether to give you more responsibility, they will remember the time you vomited on their shoes. And, of course, if you are bad enough, this one night can cost you your job. Believe me, I have stories. Even if you manage to avoid the boss, and he or she does not see you, they will hear about it. I guarantee it. They always do. On the other hand, if you drink socially, responsibly and in good fun, it's a great opportunity to get closer to your boss and the other superiors on your team. Maybe use the party as an icebreaker to find out more things you have in common or build some social friendships with your peers. Remember, everyone is just there to have fun, so try to avoid work talk as much as possible.

Here are some other tips.

1. Do not over-selfie yourself, and look at the pictures you take before you post them. Don't post anything inappropriate, holiday party or not. No one wants to go to your Facebook page the next day and see themselves in an embarrassing photo.

2. Do not treat this as a normal night out. I have bosses who tell me they have even been annoyed at people who have tried to pick up a waiter at a holiday party or been outside smoking for too long.

3. I steer clear of long conversations with co-workers' spouses, boyfriends and girlfriends. I made it a personal rule because I have a big mouth, and I know I may say something I will regret, not intentionally but something might come up. That's just me, you know yourself best, but better safe than sorry. On the note of keeping your mouth shut, it's important not to tell that office crush (and most people have one) that you like them. This comes up so much more than it should.

4. Finally, when you are leaving the party, thank your boss, and wish your coworkers a happy holidays. It is always a nice way to end the evening.

Have a fun holiday party and happy holidays from me to you!

Stephen