

Best Practices

How to keep your employees' spirits bright this holiday season

Here are a few helpful tips to manage this holiday season in healthy ways.

By **Heather Lowe** | December 08, 2021 at 09:23 AM



Traditions hold value in most workplaces, but it is OK for traditions to change. New activities and connections can come from remaining open to new ways of doing things.

The holidays can be stressful, both personally and professionally. This has never been more true than this year considering the continued state of pandemic and lagging economic indicators for businesses.

Chances are many of your employees are feeling decreased [mental/physical health](#), and/or financial fears at this time. Unfortunately, there's a general consensus that times are tough and alcohol helps. Let's unpack this misnomer.

Alcohol is marketed as the perfect corporate gift for the aspiring executive. [Drinking](#) is promoted as an effective way to cope with the madness. The "at least there's wine" mentality is harmful to many of your employees who may be struggling with addiction issues. Or they may choose not to drink for health or religious reasons. Imposing a drinking culture creates a high level of anxiety for this segment of your employee base and should be avoided.

"Some employers encourage the consumption of alcoholic beverages as a regular part of company-sponsored networking, team building, celebratory or other significant events," notes Cheryl Brown-Merriwether, vice president and executive director for [International Center for Addiction and Recovery Education](#) (ICARE).

"At the same time, some employees who choose to limit or abstain from drinking report they have been questioned or pressured by coworkers regarding their decision. Others say they have felt isolated and excluded in ways that could negatively affect their careers."

The truth is alcohol adds to exhaustion, anxious feelings, and poor health. This is the opposite effect of what you want for your valuable employees who you appreciate and want to keep.

Here are a few helpful tips to manage this holiday season in healthy ways:

1. Rethink gifting

This year, more than ever perhaps, the negative effects of consuming too much alcohol are coming to light.

A [study](#) by RAND Corporation found heavy drinking among women is up 41% from 2019 to 2020. Alcohol-related deaths have also increased. Excessive drinking increases one's risk for anxiety, depression, suicide, seven different types of cancer, stroke, and heart disease.

Alcohol has been an easy "go-to" holiday gift for business contacts. Although it might be easy and tempting to send a bottle of wine, there are many healthier, more creative, and more thoughtful ways to treat the people you care about this season.

Consider giving gifts that align with your corporate values. Perhaps a gift basket from a local artisan filled with special treats or art. Books are a great gift for employees and clients alike. If you promote wellbeing at work, your gifts should reflect that too. Gift cards for fitness, nutrition, spas or healthy hobbies, just to name a few. Gifts that encourage and support health and wellness will be appreciated by all.

2. Acknowledge the loss

The holidays may not feel like "The most wonderful time of year." If your business is not meeting key performance numbers, your team may be experiencing added stress.

Grief is amplified during the holiday season. Perhaps you have had to let employees go or halt important projects at work.

The holidays are a time for reflection and that often means a look back at what has been lost. Whether your employees are missing someone they are not able to get together with this year or grieving someone who has passed, the holidays can be a time of deep sadness.

3. Stick to a routine

Whether employees are traveling, hosting, or anything in between, one reason life seems to go haywire during the busy holiday season is because we get off track with the things that keep us physically and mentally healthy in our everyday life.

If employees work out every day, encourage them to be consistent and prioritize their workouts.

Fresh air and movement cure a lot of ailments, and just because work or home routines are thrown out of whack doesn't mean your team should give up on the things that keep them centered.

The point is to help your employees stay balanced despite what is going on around them. This will enable them to manage the extra stress this holiday season.

4. Reconsider traditions

Traditions hold value in most workplaces, but it is OK for traditions to change. New activities and connections can come from remaining open to new ways of doing things.

Traditions typically mean expectations. Expectations lead to resentment. What if you lowered your expectations and allowed room for new group experiences?

Just because something has always been done one way, doesn't mean it always has to be that way, or that it is working for everyone.

A company booze fest holiday party can be replaced with an elegant brunch, group activity, or admission to a special event or location.

It is important to note, one-third of the population doesn't drink alcohol. You will be more inclusive by considering other ways to celebrate. At a minimum, you can offer sophisticated alcohol-free alternatives for any alcohol-fueled celebrations planned.

Maybe an escape room group challenge, instead of an all-you-can-drink happy hour, will work best this year?

Remember: While change is uncomfortable, it is healthy. By implementing some of these proven tactics during the holidays you will boost employee wellness, well into the new year.

Heather Lowe is the president and founder of [Ditched the Drink](#), a wellness company whose mission is to help professionals evaluate their relationship with alcohol to align with their highest, healthiest self to do their greatest good. A Corporate Wellness Consultant, she earned her professional certifications as a Certified Life and Recovery Coach, from the NET Institute, a division of the International Center for Addiction and Recovery (ICARE).