



Employment Law Note

December 2020

Company-Sponsored Holiday Celebrations During a Pandemic



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As we near the end of one of the most challenging years in recent memory, many around the Puget Sound region are anxiously awaiting the start of a new year. 2020 has imposed significant hardships on employers and employees alike and introduced numerous novel obstacles to wreak havoc on company operations. Since March, companies and the general workforce have had to maneuver around constantly changing COVID-19 guidelines. For months now, we have had to adapt to work-from-home conditions and cancellations of all in-person professional gatherings, such as team meetings, trainings and conferences.

Traditionally, the company-sponsored holiday party has served as an opportunity to get together to celebrate the year's successes and boost team morale. Given the pandemic and strict guidelines this year, many managers are undoubtedly ambivalent about hosting or sponsoring a holiday celebration. One issue that is top of mind: whether to gather online or carefully plan an in-person celebration.

In-Person Gatherings

On November 14th, Governor Inslee announced statewide restrictions for four weeks, effectively

banning most indoor social gatherings. Per this proclamation, the following restrictions are in place until December 14th: "Indoor social gatherings with people from outside your household are prohibited unless they (a) quarantine for fourteen days (14) prior to the social gathering; or (b) quarantine for seven (7) days prior to the social gathering and receive a negative COVID-19 test result no more than 48-hours prior to the gathering. A household is defined as individuals residing in the same domicile.... Outdoor social gatherings shall be limited to five (5) people from outside your household."

<https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/proclamations/COVID%2019%20November%20Statewide%20Restrictions.pdf>) This proclamation from the governor makes it nearly impossible to have any in-person workplace celebration prior to December 14th.

If you intend on waiting until the current proclamation expires on December 14th, keep in mind that depending on the infection rates, the governor might be forced to extend the recent restrictions or implement more draconian measures. Even once the ban is lifted, in addition to local guidelines, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ("CDC") recommends that Americans "wear a mask, stay at least 6 feet

apart, avoid crowds, and wash your hands often” – hardly the recipe for a festive celebration.

So, what does this all mean for in-person company-sponsored celebrations? Managers are encouraged to host smaller team get-togethers — outdoors if possible — so that attendees can keep 6 feet apart. The CDC also provides the following guidelines for hosting holiday gatherings: 1) remind guests to stay home if they are sick; 2) encourage social distancing, *i.e.*, outdoor venues; 3) require attendees wear masks; 4) clean hands often; 5) limit the number of people handling or serving food; and 6) limit contact with commonly touched surfaces or shared items.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/personal-social-activities.html#gatherings>

Virtual Gatherings

Given the CDC’s current guidelines and ever-changing local restrictions, hosting a virtual gathering this year is the safer alternative. Below are some ideas to help you plan a fun, low-risk, and memorable virtual celebration for your employees.

- ❖ Cocktail Party - Gather your team online, pick a theme, and show up to your virtual cocktail party with your favorite drink or

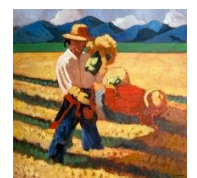
drinks. You can even pre-gift a bottle of wine to each team member. Make sure to reserve a few minutes at the beginning of your party to raise a glass and toast your team’s wins.

- ❖ Holiday Dinner – Survey your team to select a favorite local restaurant. On the day of your Virtual Holiday Dinner, have this restaurant deliver your team’s favorite menu items so that you can feast together.
- ❖ Learning Party – Stream an online class together and learn a new skill. Whatever new skill you decide to learn, you can gift the needed tools or ingredients ahead of time to help your team prepare for the class.
- ❖ Holiday Movie Night – Select your favorite holiday movie, send out movie snacks to the team before your movie night, and stream a movie together while enjoying your snacks.

As an added bonus, you can celebrate that no one will need to take a cab home at the end of the celebration!

No matter the gathering you ultimately decide to host, we wish you and your team a happy, healthy, and safe holiday season!

For more information about this month’s Employment Law Note
contact us at 425-454-4233





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has relocated as of December 1, 2020.

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(All other contact information remains the same.)

We value your business and look forward to
continuing to serve you from our new location.

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