



Holiday Celebrations When Employees are Remote

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QUESTION: I am at a loss for how to celebrate the holidays with my remote staff. I used to invite the team over to my house for dinner, drinks, and some holiday cheer. It's something we all looked forward to, but now we have several remote staff who live far away. Do you have any suggestions for how I could modify our work party plans to maintain the fun without being in person?

ANSWER: Since 2020, the number of employees working remotely has increased significantly. While working remotely has many perks, there are also challenges to connecting informally and more personally with colleagues. So, it's time to get creative. Start by listing out the aspects of your celebration that you don't want to lose. If it is important to ensure that your team feels appreciated, then perhaps you could forgo the gift exchange and instead write them each a personalized thank you note and give them an unexpected day (or partial day) off work to do something fun! Send them a gift card for a restaurant or store.

If the holidays are a chance for your office to satisfy their sweet tooth, consider swapping out the breakroom smorgasbord for a themed recipe exchange where every team member shares the recipe and a related personal memory. They can then choose to bake one of the items and eat some of the goodies together during a virtual happy hour. If comradery is the goal, consider group activities that can accommodate virtual participation. There are many options that you can find online that are fun and help your employees get to know each other. Virtual platforms, such as Zoom, also offer the opportunity to talk in small groups.

If your employees are close enough to meet in person, but want to ensure certain safety precautions, consider a location large enough where employees can socially distance or be outside. Drive-in movie theaters may offer holiday screenings or perhaps you could rent out a space big enough for your team to safely gather and do your own showing of a movie favorite. If your team likes the great outdoors, perhaps you could host a bonfire with a hot chocolate bar or go sledding as a group (assuming there is snow, and your staff are adventurous). If this season is a chance for your office to give back, you can organize a collection for families in need or have lunch catered in for your office while you all write holiday cards for soldiers serving overseas.

No matter what activities you choose for celebration, don't forget that not all employees recognize the same religious holidays. Unless you are a religious-based organization, you should be cautious about recognizing one religious holiday over another. If your company is already engaged in diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, this may be an opportunity to allow time for employees to share their holiday traditions. Sharing should not be required, but instead opened up to anyone interested in sharing.

Overall, don't skip the time to gather and celebrate the end of the year. These are opportunities for your employees to build relationships with each other, support de-stressing, and pause to remember all that you have accomplished as a company. Even if you are not able to meet in person, your employees will appreciate the time and effort that went into the celebration. Its these types of gatherings, with laughter and fun, that help employees remember why they enjoy working for your company and provide momentum for the work as you move into the new year.