

Yes, Reader, There is a Santa Claus!

(Or, how to navigate the holiday decisions facing your business – start planning now!)

By Brenda R. Haughney

I am sitting in the living room of the VanLandingham Estate (a local treasure for business meetings and events) enjoying the soft music and the beautiful decorations in the entry hall, on the fireplace mantel, and in the corner on one of several trees.

Because I am waiting on my small business network group to arrive, it reminds me of the impact the holidays have on businesses:

- More folks take or ask for vacation time.
- The stress level is high with everyone trying to juggle year-end business demands and many more personal activities.
- Business travel is more costly and difficult.

And then we come to the political correctness of it all:

1. Do we decorate our work areas?
2. Do we draw names and exchange gifts?
3. Do we support one or more charitable organizations as a business or an employee group or both?
4. If so, which charitable organization do we choose?
5. Do we have a holiday party?
6. If so, do we do something traditional or fun?
7. Do we serve alcohol at the party?
8. If we serve alcohol, do we have an open bar, provide tickets to limit the number of drinks, or use the honor system?
9. Do we offer taxis as an alternative to driving?
10. What if we have vegetarians in the group?
11. How do we acknowledge the holiday season and embrace all the many cultural differences?
12. Do we begin to answer the office phones - Happy Holidays?
13. Do we give employees bonuses, turkeys, hams, and/ or gift certificates?
14. Do we hold a separate event for management, board members, etc.?
15. Do we allow for a centralized celebration or decentralized ones?
16. Do we include just employees or employees and guests?
17. What days will be given off?
18. Do we send our fellow workers cards?
19. Do we buy the boss a present?
20. Do we buy close co-workers presents?

21. What do we do for customers to say thank you for their business?

There are so many questions and so many nuances to think about! To best manage your way through this maze of issues, start planning early - now or very soon for the next holiday season. If you are going to book a facility for a party and/ or hire a caterer, you may need to start six months to one year ahead of time.

I would suggest naming a holiday committee with a designated chairperson. Give them this list of questions and others that you may think of. Ensure the committee is small - three to six members. Make membership an option but ensure your group is diverse. Don't give the committee final authority. Give them a budget or ask them to develop a budget. Ask them to come to the designated decision-maker for approval of the plan and key decisions along the way. If you are going to have a party, get invitations out early. You may want to at least pass the word of the date and time long before invitations are mailed. Be specific about attire, etc.

Ask others their experience - what has worked and what has not - in celebrating the holidays in a business setting. Learn from your past successes and mistakes. And lastly, you can decide to hire a consultant or event planner to do it all for you.

The holidays can be a morale booster for your team members if you get through this labyrinth properly and with aplomb. Good luck and happy holidays!