

Diversity Committee –December 2008



January 2009 CELEBRATIONS

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| 1 - Emancipation Day (African-American, United States) | 13 - Lohri (Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh) |
| 1 - Feast of St. Basil (Christian, Orthodox) | 16 - Religious Freedom Day |
| 1 - Japanese New Year | 20 - World Religion Day (Baha'i) |
| 1 - New Year's Day (United States) | 26 - Chinese Lunar New Year (China, Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam) |
| 5 - Guru Gobind Singh's Birthday (Sikh) | 26 - India Republic Day |
| 6 - Epiphany or Twelfth Day (Christian) | 26 - Tet Nguyen Dan (Vietnam) "Year of the Buffalo" |
| 6 - Three Kings' Day | |
| 7 - Ashura (Islamic, Muslim) | |
| 7 - The Nativity of Jesus Christ (Christian, Orthodox) | |

DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE



The Christmas Dilemma

Evelina Silveira, President, Diversity At Work

While the holidays can bring lots of cheer, for HR departments, they can also mean a lot of headaches, when it comes to planning a staff Christmas party. With increasing pressure to be inclusive, how do you plan a Christmas party, when you have employees who do not celebrate Christmas? Or, do you even have one at all?

Many diversity consultants will argue that calling the year- end event, a Christmas party is politically incorrect; however, I will argue that no matter what you call a staff party that occurs after the middle of November and before December 25th, it is a Christmas party! If you call it an "Xmas party " or a "Holiday Gathering", there is a good chance that you could be alienating the people it was intended to attract –people who celebrate Christmas! In fact, I heard a true story about a man who refused to attend the Christmas party when it was re-named a "Holiday Gathering". As a devout Christian, he was offended by the absence of the word "Christ" from the name of the gathering.

Exclusion happens when we solely focus on one group of people and cater to their needs, ignoring the requests and needs of others who do not fit into the same category. Religious minorities, or individuals who do not celebrate Christmas, may find a "conventional" Christmas party to be exclusive, if this is the only way a company recognizes its staff; however, there are many ways of making employees feel included, and appreciated throughout the year, outside of the Christmas party. Staff appreciation and recognition of cultural/religious and commemorative days should be celebrated throughout the year. This highlights a company's commitment and appreciation for diversity. Furthermore, it allows others to partake in the festivities, thus creating awareness. It is interesting to note for example, that KPMG chooses a set number of holidays and events each year that they are going to celebrate, alternating these celebrations from year to year. Some years, a Christmas party does not occur. However, because KPMG has such a strong commitment to

diversity and inclusion this appears to be less of an issue for their company. When employees feel valued throughout the year, having a Christmas party is not as significant for those who do not celebrate Christmas.

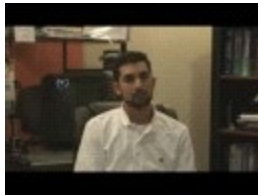
If you are planning to have a Christmas party, here are a few ideas to keep your event as inclusive as possible:

- Choose to have a party during office hours. This makes it easier for people who have elder or childcare responsibilities after work, who will have to make alternate arrangements, or who have a second job to attend. Office parties on the weekends with a dance, can be a deterrent for single people without a partner.
- Ensure that your venue is accessible. Are the activities that you have planned for the event, ones that your guests will be able to participate?
- Consult a current diversity calendar to ensure that the day that you choose does not conflict with other events that are going on.
- Do not mix religious symbols with each other, for example a Star of David on a Christmas tree or Hanukkah with Christmas. (Hanukkah, for example is a very minor holiday in Judaism and does not take on the magnitude that Christmas does).
- Keep Christmas decorations in the office neutral. Snowflakes, snowmen are a good examples of neutral symbols. Do not force employees to decorate their work areas for Christmas, it needs to be their choice.
- Remember to ask staff if they have any special dietary restrictions. Avoid serving pork and pork products as Muslims, Jews, and Seventh Day Adventists and others are unable to consume them. Hindus do not eat beef. Chicken or fish are good choices; but also ensure that there are vegetarian options to accommodate some religious groups and the growing number of health conscious consumers. Have your caterer place vegetarian dishes apart from meat ones. Keep seafood and pork separately from other dishes as well. This decreases the likelihood of cross-contamination, making it easier for some religious minorities to partake in the food.
- Schedule the party during the week rather than on a weekend, as it is less likely to interfere with employees' family time, and Sabbath observances.
- Always be aware that an employee has the right to refuse to participate in an activity or celebration that they feel might compromise their belief system.
- Don't penalize an employee for failing to come to a Christmas party. If you are offering employees gifts at the party, ensure that they still receive theirs.

Remember you can't please everyone, although you can certainly do your best and try!. Involving a diverse group of staff in the planning of your festivities will help to take the pressure away from you and ensure that you don't overlook some of the details."



Watch [This month's recommended video](#)
IBM Religious Accommodation



ON TOP OF DIVERSITY EVENTS

Mastering Aboriginal Inclusion Workshop. | January 13--14, 2009. Victoria, BC.

Discover proven tactics to recruit, retain and advance aboriginal talent while building a work culture that flourishes through diversity.

Contact: Crystal Kosa. E: ckose@aboriginalhr.ca. T: 780.922.0713.



The Future Face of Business: Supporting Your Diverse Workforce. | January 22, 2009. London, ON.

A day long event that includes sessions on orientating new Canadians for employment success, inclusion and assistive technology, working with unions on employment equity and diversity issues, and mentoring employee resource groups.

More information [HERE](#)

Register online: www.yourdiversityatwork.com. T: 519.659.4777

