

There are Many Ways to Give Employees Holiday Cheer

By Holly Culhane, Contributing Columnist



A person could get whiplash reading analysts' predictions for 2013 holiday sales.

A gloom-and-doom survey released this month by American Express reported that less than one third of small retailers believed holiday sales this year would be strong. This was down from a more optimistic 41 percent last year. And 34 percent of all small businesses surveyed expected the 2013 season to be weak.

But then along comes the release of federal Commerce Department data, which showed retail sales climbed in October by the most in three months. Even a government shutdown had not discouraged shoppers.

The figures boosted the holiday-sales outlook for national retailers and showed consumer spending, which accounts for almost 70 percent of the economy, is picking up from a third-quarter slowdown.

Bloomberg painted a rosy view, reporting that cheaper gasoline is stretching Americans' paychecks at the same time higher stock prices and home values are driving gains in household wealth.

Number crunchers will be mulling over the "economic tea leaves" in the results of "Black Friday" sales for additional signs of a weak or strong holiday retail season.

The bottom line is that no one will know how the 2013 season will turn out until the last cash register sings. In the meantime, the nation's fragile economic recovery is making just about all business owners a bit jumpy.

They are watching expenses and looking for ways to cut. And often on the chopping block is a company's holiday employee party.

But it is possible to be frugal and still celebrate. A holiday party does not have to include a rented hall, food, alcohol, entertainment and spectacular door prizes. In fact, a stepped-down celebration actually might be appreciated by more employees.

It might come as a shock to business owners and managers, but some workers would rather take a stick in the eye than spend their off hours hanging with the "boss" or even their colleagues. Alternative holiday options may be more inclusive and greeted with more enthusiasm.

A couple of less expensive alternatives are:

Workplace party – Hold the party during working hours and in the workplace. Food can range from the boss buying pizza to employees contributing to a potluck. My favorite example of this type of party is a local company that furnishes the turkey and substantial side dishes, with employees providing items for

the dessert bar. As a nice added touch, the company's owner and managers can serve their employees during the holiday lunch.

Holiday shopping day – Celebrations are not always parties. Give employees a half-day or full-day off with pay to do their holiday shopping. If the budget allows, include a gift certificate to a local retailer. This can yield employee appreciation, while showing support for local businesses.

However a business decides to celebrate the holidays, owners and managers must be mindful not to force people to attend. Some people's religions may prohibit attendance. Some employees may not want to attend for other reasons. Parties should be fun – not command performances.

And if alcohol is served, provide a way home for people who drink too much. If it is a company event, the company can be held responsible for consequences. The cost of offering taxi or limousine service can be less than facing the liability.

The purpose of a holiday party is to show employees appreciation, and there are a variety of ways to do just that. Happy Holly-Days!

This article written by Holly Culhane first appeared online and in The Bakersfield Californian on Thursday, November 28, 2013. Holly Culhane is president of the Bakersfield-based human resources consulting firm P.A.S. Associates. She can be contacted through her website www.pasassociates.com and through the [PAS Facebook](#) page or by phone at 631-2165.

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