

# 2017 HOLIDAY SURVIVAL GUIDE!

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A few weeks ago I saw my first holiday commercial of the season! And just last week I attended the first of several holiday business events on my calendar scheduled between now and New Year's. I love this time of year and really look forward to the opportunity to get together with friends and colleagues to catch up and do a bit of holiday inspired networking! But, I also know that for many the obligatory company sponsored holiday celebrations are the stuff of nightmares.

And while company sponsored celebrations may not be as lavish as they once were, the traditional year-end celebration remains a tried and true corporate tradition. Done right, the traditional holiday get together is a great chance to bolster all of your valuable business relationships. Done wrong – these social events can have negative and far reaching impacts on your career. So, learning how to handle yourself: knowing how to meet people, engage in small talk and socialize, are all key to surviving the holiday party circuit and presenting yourself in the best light possible. And to help you on your way....for the second year in a row, SAFFIRE LEGAL is here to help you not only survive, but thrive this holiday season!

Critical skills for any business social setting include knowing how to:

- Create a positive image of yourself and your company;
- Be a good host and a good guest;
- Engage in small talk and to socialize; and
- Politely disengage from any social conversation

Over the next four weeks we'll be publishing a series of podcasts and social media posts providing business social etiquette tips and insights into all of these critical skills. Starting today, we'll be helping you create a positive image of yourself and your company.

## **The Importance of an RSVP**

When it comes to business social events, the first step in creating a positive image starts long before you make your grand entrance. It starts with responding to the invitation. The RSVP or “please respond” request is an important but often overlooked detail of business etiquette. Failing to respond to an invitation is one of the most frustrating mistakes people make – did you catch that? By failing to respond to the invitation, you’ve frustrated your host and are well on your way to making a bad impression – and you haven’t even set foot in the door!

Failing to RSVP sends the message to your host that you really don’t think much of the effort they’ve taken in putting together their holiday celebration, or worse, you’re holding out for a better offer.

The point of etiquette is to build and maintain relationships. We do this by showing consideration, respect, and honesty with our actions, words, and appearance. The RSVP may seem like a small thing, but it is a terrific way for you to show respect and appreciation and to set yourself apart from other attendees. And in a world where job performance skills will get you only so far, banking a bit of goodwill and showing off your personal skills might just make all the difference when it comes to closing the deal or getting that next plum assignment.

### **A Few RSVP Tips:**

First, be sure to respond to invitations IMMEDIATELY! Waiting until later to send your response is always a big mistake. Invitations can be easily forgotten or lost as they sit in your email inbox or on your desk amongst all the other clutter. A good rule of thumb is to respond within a day or two of receiving the invitation.

### **Unsure as to your availability?**

One of the first things a host worries about is whether or not you got the invitation. So, it is important that you let your host know you have received the invitation. The next concern is

whether or not you'll be able to make it to the event. Be honest, if you're not sure you can attend, let your host know you received the invitation and that you'll let get back to them about whether or not you'll be able to attend once you check your calendar (and of course that of your +1 if appropriate). Be sure to tell your host when they can expect you to let them know definitively if you will be able to attend or not. Then, don't forget to calendar that date and follow up.

If you have to decline, be straightforward and honest. There is no need to elaborate, a simple, "I have a prior engagement" or "I will be on vacation" should suffice. It's also bad form to set conditions on your attendance. Asking the host before you accept, "what will you be serving?" or "who will be attending?" sets a bad tone and shows that you're not someone whose good at navigating all types of social situations. Not a great reputation to have when it comes to the world of business social events!

Confused by "Regrets only" RSVP requests? You're not alone. The idea behind a 'regrets only' request is that you need only reply if you can't attend. That way the host doesn't get inundated with replies. But, this means that if your host doesn't hear from you then they're expecting you to be there! If you can't attend and simply forget to reply or can't recall if you did or didn't reply it can pose a problem for the host. When it comes to this type of RSVP I recommend responding either way so there is no confusion.

### **Don't Get A Bad Rep!**

Etiquette is about building relationships through our actions, words and appearance, so you'll want to be sure that you don't get a reputation as someone who often 'no shows' at events. Consistently replying "yes" to business social events and failing to show gives the impression that you are either a flake, you're not interested, or you can't manage your time or your calendar. None of those scenarios sends a great message to those around you – especially those in a position to influence your career.

You'll also want to be sure that you take care when changing a "no" to a "yes." If you discover you can attend an event after having sent a "no" you'll want to reach out to the host as soon as possible to ask if there is still room for you to attend. **DON'T JUST SHOW UP!** Depending on the event, this will likely not be a problem, but it's always best to let the host decide.

**Do not bring uninvited guests.**

Bringing along uninvited guests – including your spouse, significant other, or child – is almost as bad as failing to respond to an invitation. No one should simply show up with an uninvited guest. Don't put your host or uninvited guest(s) on the spot by carelessly thinking it will all work out – your host may have a specially planned seating arrangement, many venues have a limit on the number of occupants allowed, or may not allow for adding another guest for dinner. Trust me, nothing will spoil a deal or put you in a bad light with everyone faster than forcing your host to turn your guest away.

**Lastly, make note of the dress code when you receive the invitation.**

The combination of good grooming and good manners is a sure-fire recipe for social success in your personal and your professional life. When you are dressed appropriately the focus stays where it should: on building and strengthening your business relationships. The last thing you want is for that important client or out of town partner to be wondering why you're wearing a wrinkled shirt and stained tie when you really want them focused on your impressive social skills. Your holiday social attire should give you confidence – especially if you're not that comfortable in social settings. So, if it's appropriate, wear that lucky tie or those power heels and give yourself that special confidence boost.

Formal invitations will always include "black tie" or "white tie" somewhere on the invitation. Most informal invitations don't include a dress code, but for something in between – such as a business related event – some type of dress code is usually included: Casual dress, business casual, no jeans or jacket required. If the dress code is not mentioned on the invitation and you're not sure - it's perfectly fine to call the host, or a business contact from the host organization, or another invitee to ask.

Here's a quick rundown of the basic dress codes:

**For holidays:**

Sport coat or blazer (any color), coordinating slacks, open collar shirt or dress shirt, tie with a holiday theme

Cocktail dress, long skirt/top, dressy pants or separates, LBD, holiday colors and accessories

**Business Formal**

Dark business suit, dress shirt, conservative tie, dress leather shoes/dark socks

Suit, business-style dress, dress with a jacket, heels or flats

**Business Casual**

Sport coat/blazer with coordinating slacks or kakis, dress shirt, causal button down or open collar or polo shirt, optional tie, loafers or loafer style shoes/socks

Skirt, khakis or pants, open collar shirt, knit shirt or sweater, dress (avoid spaghetti straps or ultra-low cut necklines)

To be on the safe side you'll always want to check and stick to your company's dress code.

Office holiday parties serve to build morale and showcase a company and its personnel. They also provide employees the chance to get better acquainted and establish business and professional relationships. Start the holiday season by distinguishing yourself as someone who knows how to build solid business relationships.

Join us next week.... Being a good host and a good guest – The one drink rule!