

## Festive fun in the office

Walk into any British office in the last week of December and you might be forgiven for thinking you had walked onto the set of a remake of Saturday Night Fever crossed with some low budget Disney Christmas film. For chances are that what was once a dull workplace will have been transformed with glitter balls, disco lights and hastily arranged decorations in preparation for the social event of the year for millions of office workers throughout the land - the Christmas party.

These events, usually held on-site in the week before the holiday begins, have become an established part of the modern British Christmas experience and have several common elements. The music should be 'cheesy'- think Abba or Wham along with a selection of Christmas themed pop favourites, something that anyone can recognise and dance to, regardless of age or the quantity of alcohol imbibed. Decoration will be simple and often jokey- a fax machine may be wrapped in tinsel or an angel perched on top of a computer monitor, a form of revenge perhaps on the machines that have tormented us all year. Food and drink ought to be plentiful and bring back memories of childhood birthday parties, sausages on sticks, cheese footballs, crisps etc but with the vital additional element - alcohol or 'booze'.

Christmas parties are notorious for mild acts of misbehaviour. They are a time to 'let your hair down' and for the duration of the event the normal rules of office life are temporarily suspended. It is okay to drink a little too much, eat a little too much and to perhaps say things to your boss that you wouldn't normally say. People are actually expected to make fools of themselves, casting off their inhibitions and joining in with whatever good natured banter or mischievous pranks are taking place. People who really shouldn't dance will be encouraged to do so. And seniority is no excuse for non-participation. Christmas parties are egalitarian affairs where, for one night only, the cleaning lady is on the same level as the CEO. Hierarchies evaporate in the heady festive atmosphere.

Another key ingredient of the Christmas 'do' is romance. Many would be 'office Romeos' see the event as a prime flirting opportunity. Couples may disappear into store cupboards for a little illicit 'snogging'. Those with more serious long-term intentions may see this as their best chance to get together with the object of their undeclared affection, the chance to release the tensions built up over a year of stolen glances across the photocopier. A good Christmas party should generate enough gossip for the whole year

Ultimately the Christmas party serves to round off the working year on a high note with enmities forgotten and camaraderie enhanced. Fittingly then, the BBC's brilliant comedy 'The Office' chose to set the finale of the show at the fictional company's Christmas 'bash'. All the essential ingredients are included and the programme ends with the long awaited blossoming of secretary Dawn and sales rep Tim's romance, sealed with a lingering kiss under the disco lights and accompanied by the cheesy soundtrack of an archetypal Christmas party.

Glossary:

Cheesy	old fashioned, over familiar
Let your hair down	relax and unwind
Snogging	kissing