Please, no more lampshades.

The days of office parties where coworkers let down their hair, got roaring drunk, and ended up wearing lampshades are out of style. Fortunately for everyone, the office party has matured, by and large, into a more relaxed event where coworkers can actually socialize and get to know a little about each other without thinking about deadlines—or getting hit on by Bob from marketing.

Plan early.

If you're in charge of scheduling the office party, start planning as soon as possible. Send invitations or let co-workers know the date, time and location at least one month in advance so they can plan accordingly. Everyone's date book fills up quickly during the holiday season. Also be sure to let them know if the invitation includes spouses, significant others and family members.

Spouses.

Often, spouses and significant others are invited to holiday parties, too. Make sure they feel included and comfortable. Let them know what to wear, and give them a heads up on bosses and colleagues who are likely to be there. At the party, don't ditch them. Make sure you introduce them to your important workplace family.

You're going to have to talk to *someone*.

If the thought of party small talk makes you sweat, don't panic. People who blather on are usually the ones who embarrass themselves—not the quiet type. Simply think before you

speak. Have a list of potential topics in mind that will help you get a conversation going—or consult a popular magazine or two for ideas. Try to avoid yes or no questions. "What are your plans for the holidays?" will generate a more detailed response than "Are you traveling for the holidays?" And remember, the wallflower near the buffet is probably looking for a conversation just as much as you are.

Was photocopying your butt ever a good idea?

People who drink too much at office parties are taking the risk of seriously harming their professional careers. The chemistry you had and acted on with Jennifer at the holiday office party may seem less than romantic in the clear, sober office environment. And management may think twice about trusting you with their biggest client after your drunken Karaoke rendition of “Be My Baby.” The safest way to avoid any embarrassing situations is to stay in control and limit your drinking.

Be thankful.

Be sure to thank the host of your holiday office party, as well as any of the people who worked to plan the event. No festive occasion comes off without hard work, and it’s a task that often gets overlooked. A verbal thank you is sufficient, an e-mail acceptable, but a hand-written note makes you stand out—and conveys a deeper level of warmth and sincerity.

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