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How not to be an office party pooper

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Drinking too much, eating like a beast and gossiping about your boss? These are all major office party no nos!



Article: Zinhle Matenji

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It's that time of year, when your inbox starts overflowing with invites to office parties and Christmas lunches. For the prepared, these can be a rich opportunity to network, strengthen your relationships with colleagues and enjoy their company in an environment away from the daily grind – but there are some rules to be observed.

Stay away from the booze

The first and most important is: stay away from the drinks table. Of course it's tempting to grab a glass of wine, especially if you're feeling in need of a boost before introducing yourself to unfamiliar workmates. But there's nothing more unbecoming than being visibly the worse for wear – and it will do your professionalism no favours.

Don't stuff your face

It's also best to avoid overindulging when it comes to food. Unless it's a sit down affair, you'll be doing the standing/talking/eating juggle, which can be difficult to pull off with elegance. Solve the problem by filling up at home, so you won't feel the need to hit the canapés.

Be friendly

One of the problems with office parties is that you don't always know everyone there, and it's easy to feel at a loose end in front of so many strangers. Remember that everyone else is probably feeling the same way, so don't hesitate to join a group. Before you do though, introduce yourself by explaining your role within the company. Saying something like, "Hi, I'm S'bu and I joined the HR department in February" will give context and a frame of reference for the others to address you.

Think before you speak

Nervousness makes some people shy, while it makes others feel like they have to keep the conversation running. If you fall into the second category, be conscious of how you feel. Take a breath and wait a second before speaking, so that you don't babble or dominate a conversation. And remember that the best way to win over people is to show that you are interested in them, and asking questions.

Don't gossip

An important point: although you might think the easiest way to start a conversation is to talk about a colleague that you all know (and have strong opinions about), gossip should always be taboo.

Say thanks

Before you go, be sure to thank the host. Remember that this is their special way of showing you, and the rest of the staff, that your hard work is appreciated.

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Zinhle Matenji is the founder and managing director of executive search firm SearchSpecifics.

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