

## Holiday Joy Should be of the Non-Harassing Variety

QUESTION: We had our company holiday party over the weekend, and although most of the employees have commented that they had a great time partying with their coworkers, the buzz is really more about how R, one of the team leaders, had too much “holiday nog” and acted a bit uninhibited at the party.

According to employees, R arrived smelling of alcohol and began hugging female coworkers very tightly, calling it their dose of “holiday sugar.” Once he started mingling at the party, R went around recruiting others to take pictures of him with his camera, and would pose by grabbing several female coworkers and pulling them into the picture with him.

When the caterer politely refused to serve R a glass of wine, he pulled a flask out of his jacket and spiked his soda. He didn’t seem to be making an effort to act discreetly. In fact, I saw him do it several times but I didn’t say anything to him about it.

R’s temporary emancipation from professional behavior continued once the dancing started. R was doing what he boisterously and repeatedly referred to as “the nasty dance,” mostly with reluctant dance partners who looked a bit embarrassed by R’s dance moves. What I observed was that many of the women he started to ask to dance with him saw R coming and eluded him to avoid his awkward dance moves.

Even though I’m a supervisor, I didn’t say anything to R about any of this because I didn’t want to cause a scene or embarrass anyone at the party. Besides, no one was complaining to me about R’s behavior, in fact people seemed more amused than offended by his antics.

So now that we’re back at work, others are still laughing about R’s behavior, and no one has actually complained to me about it. I’m wondering if I should say something to him anyway so that the same thing doesn’t happen at the next company party and offend someone. What, if anything, should I do?

ANSWER: You should definitely be proactive about dealing with R's behavior at the company holiday party. As a supervisor, the mere fact that you observed R acting inappropriately means that you have an obligation to take reasonable action to put a stop to R's inappropriate behavior. In fact, it sounds as if R's behavior was sufficiently outrageous that you or another manager should have sent him home from the party - preferably by calling him a cab or making sure someone else was R's designated driver in light of his intoxicated state.

Of further concern is R's status as a team leader. His holiday party behavior may have compromised employees' respect for any supervisory authority he has as a team leader now that his party personality has been revealed.

You should conduct an investigation and take appropriate remedial action - which means that which is necessary to end the inappropriate behavior. For example, while considering what remedial action is appropriate, consider R's status as a team leader - demoting him and removing any supervisory duties he has may be appropriate depending on the results of your investigation.

Your obligation as an employer to protect employees from a hostile environment due to an employee's unsuitable behavior extends to company-sponsored events like the holiday party. This is true despite the fact that employees, including R, were off-duty when the inappropriate conduct occurred, and applies whether the party took place on the work premises or somewhere else like a restaurant or hotel ballroom.

For more information about this and other important information for Oregon employers, contact our website at [www.oregon.gov/boli/ta](http://www.oregon.gov/boli/ta).