

Appreciating Diversity During the Holidays

Guess who's not celebrating Christmas this year? *Millions of people in the US.*

That's right. *Tens of millions* of Americans don't celebrate Christmas religiously, either as followers of non-Christian religions (Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Jews) or as individuals with no religious affiliation. It is easy to overlook the depth of diversity present in America during the Christmas season. In reality, many different events, both spiritual, religious, and tradition based, are being celebrated in many different ways during these times.

In order to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for all employees, regardless of their religious or cultural beliefs, a few simple guidelines can keep the fun in holiday celebrations.

- Be careful when selecting a date for a holiday party in the workplace. Try to avoid dates that may conflict with important dates in other cultures and religions.
- Try to keep decorations neutral, with symbols – flowers, balloons, candles and snowflakes – that can be enjoyed by most people. If traditional decorations are preferred, expand the traditional decorations to include a variety of symbols that represent the employees. Ask employees what symbols and decorations that would like to have included in the celebration. Items can be placed on display with a written description describing the tradition, or employees can be given an opportunity on the agenda to share a story. This can be an opportunity to learn about different cultures and religions and the traditions that accompany them.
- Accommodate diverse palates, including dishes on the menu that can be enjoyed by everyone, including vegetarians. For example, pork is forbidden for Jewish and Muslim people. Shellfish is prohibited for Jewish people and beef is not eaten by Hindus. While coffee, tea and caffeinated soda may seem safe, members of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) and Seventh-Day Adventists are prohibited from consuming caffeine. Therefore, juice may be an acceptable choice.
- Remember, some people do not attend parties at all. Members of the Jehovah's Witnesses do not participate in parties or gift-giving. No one should be pressured to attend the party.
- The most important thing is to use the time as an opportunity to celebrate, have fun and enjoy one another.

Penn State University, Diversity in the workplace: What about the Christmas Party?
Simma Lieberman Associates, Appreciating diversity during the holidays: It's about more than just a simple "Happy Holidays" greeting card.