

# The Courier-Journal

Courier-Journal, The (Louisville, KY)

December 6, 2006

## Oh, Behave!

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Edition: metro

Section: Velocity

Page: 20V

Estimated printed pages: 3

Article Text:

Put down the eggnog and step away from the mistletoe. Don't be the life of the office party.

By Javacia N. Harris

The wait staff at the Ritz Carlton hotel are very good at what they do, a lesson Kate Zabriskie learned one night at a business party when her wine glass never seemed to empty. Suddenly, she was way past her two-drink minimum.

"I looked over at my date and said, 'I think we have a problem. I am very drunk and we need to go,'" she said.

Zabriskie, a business etiquette consultant in Washington, D.C., was smart enough to head for the door before she ended up dancing on the bar or making out with her date.

But she's been to plenty of other company parties where people haven't been quite as wise. She has witnessed drunken dirty dancing, despite the trouble that could be caused by one snap from a colleague's camera phone. She's even seen a CEO who couldn't hold his liquor spew Technicolor holiday cheer in front of everyone.

Once again, 'tis the season for holiday parties. And again this year, people who know better are going to have a few too many, proposition a co-worker, tell the boss how they really feel or reveal a little too much of themselves.

As founder of Business Training Works, which works with clients like Microsoft, Bank One and the U.S. Coast Guard, Zabriskie is in the business of keeping people from looking like idiots in front of their bosses.

Aside from setting (and sticking to) a drink limit, here are her other tips on how to leave the company party without also being asked to leave the company.

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Be punctual. If the affair is a cocktail party with a set start and end time, "you better be there on time," she said. If it's a more informal gathering, arrive about 15 minutes after the start time if you don't want to be the first person there.

Work the room. Don't hog anybody's time, especially that of your boss, Zabriskie warned. "Ten to 12 minutes is enough with any one person," she said. Be sure to read the newspaper that morning so you'll have plenty of current events about which to make small talk. Just steer clear of politics.

Choose your date carefully. If you decide to bring a date, make sure it's someone you believe will be responsible enough to behave professionally. "This is not like a fraternity party; you're still at work," she said. "If (your date) shows up wearing some Jennifer Lopez looking outfit, that's probably not a good thing."

Don't close the place. "You do not want to be that last person to leave," Zabriskie said. But you shouldn't be the first person out the door, either, she warned. The more junior you are in your company, the more you need to leave when everyone else does.

Here are some other dos and don'ts from business etiquette gurus.

Don't...

"Work the room selling your child's school fundraiser magazine subscriptions," said Debra Condren, a business psychologist and author.

"Delude yourself into believing that the holiday party is a good time to start that office romance you've been mulling over," said Donna Flag of The Krysalis Group, a human resource and management consulting firm in New York City. Also, "Don't mistake the social setting as the right opportunity to share your deepest, darkest secrets with co-workers."

Do...

Talk about something other than business, even if it's Britney Spears, said Diane K. Danielson, author of "Table Talk: The Savvy Girls' Alternative to Networking." "This is the company's attempt to have fun."

"Try to meet some new people," she added. "It's a perfect time to expand your network beyond your immediate officemates.

"Dress for the office, not for a date," Danielson said.

"Chat with the spouses and significant others of co-workers, especially if they are with someone who could have influence over your career," she said. "Trust me, the lonely and bored spouse will talk you up long after the party."

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Record Number: lou37349266