

The New York Times

Getting Creative for the 2020 Office Holiday Party

Because yet another Google hangout is not going to cut it.



By Nicole Pajer

Dec. 3, 2020

On Dec. 18, a festively decorated double-decker bus will stop in New Jersey and New York City to pick up the few employees of Consultancy Media, a broadcast media studio and production company. Each will be handed kits containing prepackaged snacks, rubber gloves, hand sanitizer and a themed face mask, which they will be required to put on before boarding and sitting eight feet apart.

A masked bartender will serve a “Very Consultancy” cocktail,” which guests will occasionally lower their masks to sip. They will pass around a karaoke microphone with gloved hands and — somewhat muffled — belt out everything from Frank Sinatra to heavy metal Christmas tunes as the bus travels past several light shows.

Since no escorts are allowed, the event will meet Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s Covid-19 cap of 10 people at a New York gathering.

Welcome to the office holiday party, an annual rite already imperiled by anti-harassment reforms that now must try to keep a most unwelcome guest, the no-longer-novel coronavirus, from spoiling the fun.

To put it mildly, this been a tough year for corporate America: furloughs, layoffs, pay cuts; juggling parenting or elder care with work (or picking up other people’s slack). Now throw seasonal affective disorder into the mix. “I have been giving mental health talks for large employers and they’re coming to me saying employee morale is lower than ever,” said Dr. Nina Vasan, clinical assistant professor of psychiatry at Stanford University School of Medicine.

Taking a moment to recognize efforts and having fun as a team can help to elevate low spirits, and therefore many employers are adamant about plowing ahead with a holiday celebration. But throwing a party in late 2020 isn’t remotely easy, even for professional event planners and producers.