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2020 Holiday Party Survey Report

COVID CANCELS HOLIDAY PARTIES; 44% WILL NOT HOLD A PARTY SPECIFICALLY DUE TO COVID

CHICAGO, October 26, 2020 – One year after nearly 76% of companies planned to hold holiday parties, just 23% of companies are planning a year-end celebration this year, and 74% of those will be virtual events, according to survey results released Monday by global outplacement and business and executive coaching firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.

According to the annual survey on holiday party plans, conducted online in October among 189 human resources representatives at companies of various sizes and industries across the country. Of all respondents, 1.3% will hold their events in-person without any precautions.

“It is no surprise that many companies are forgoing the holiday party this year. It’s difficult to celebrate and implement all the precautions needed to keep everyone safe. The last thing any employer wants is an outbreak due to their year-end party,” said Andrew Challenger, Senior Vice President of Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.

Of the respondents, 5.3% will hold in-person parties, 4% reported they will modify the event due to COVID, with 100% of those mandating masks and social distancing. The survey also found 67% will limit the number of attendees, and 33% reported they will take temperatures and hold the event outside.

Will your company hold an in-person holiday party this year?	2020
No, we had one last year, but we are not holding one this year due to COVID.	44.00%
No, but we are hosting a virtual event due to COVID.	17.33%
Each location will make a determination according to local COVID mandates and public health guidance.	12.00%
Unsure at this time.	10.67%
No, we had a party last year, but not this year due to cost-cutting.	5.33%
Yes, we always hold holiday parties, but it will be modified due to COVID.	4.00%
No, we never have holiday parties.	4.00%
Yes, we always hold holiday parties and will not modify it due to COVID.	1.33%
No, other reasons.	1.33%

Source: Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc. ©

Overall, 54.6% of companies will not hold an event this year, the highest rate since Challenger began the survey in 2004. Of those, 44% of companies canceled plans specifically due to COVID. Another 5.3% report they are not having a party due to cost-cutting, while 4% report they never hold holiday parties.

Uncertainty is another factor in company plans, as 22.7% of companies said they were unsure whether they will host a party this year or were waiting for state and local guidance before making a decision.

Meanwhile, many companies report they have not yet brought all their workers back to the office in person. The majority of respondents (55%) are keeping most of their staff working from home (WFH), and another 5.5% have all their workers working from home.

Have you brought back workers into a physical office?	2020
We have essential functions in person, but are keeping the majority of our staff working from home.	54.79%
We have reopened offices and given our workers a choice to return.	15.07%
We followed state and local guidance on reopening and/or have a certain percentage back in the office.	9.59%
All our employees are back in the office.	8.22%
We are an essential business, and all our workers must be in person.	6.85%
All our workers are still working from home.	5.48%
Other.	1.37%

Source: Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc. ©

When asked when employers plan to bring all workers back to the office, 44% were unsure or did not answer. Another 21.3% planned to bring all workers back in early 2021, and 8% will wait for a vaccine.

When do you plan to bring all workers back to the office?	2020
Unsure/no answer.	44.00%
Early 2021.	21.33%
Mid-2021.	9.33%
As soon as there is a vaccine.	8.00%
We will keep workers at home indefinitely.	6.67%
As soon as experts deem it safe.	5.33%
We have converted some positions to permanent work-from-home status.	2.67%
Late 2020.	1.33%
Other.	1.33%

Source: Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc. ©

“Employers are creating and modifying their WFH policies as they go, making it extremely difficult to plan for basic operations, much less their holiday parties,” said Challenger.

In its annual survey, Challenger typically asks respondents if the economy is doing better than last year. This year, the firm asked if COVID has impacted the company’s specific business conditions. Over half (52%) report business conditions are worse, while 14% report an improvement. Another 17% report mixed results from different business segments.

Has COVID directly impacted your business?	2020
Business conditions are worse due to COVID.	52.31%
Business conditions have improved due to COVID.	13.85%
COVID hasn't impacted business conditions.	16.92%
Some segments are up, while others are down.	16.92%

Source: Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc. ©

“Millions of Americans are still out of work and many others are waiting to hear if their jobs still exist. Of those who are employed, many may be experiencing survivor syndrome or are dealing with other energy- and morale-sapping issues at home. It is imperative that companies look for ways to celebrate their employees,” said Challenger.

“Many workers now have extensive experience with video conferencing software, and even a short happy hour can help connect employees. Managers can facilitate games using apps like Houseparty or find online trivia games and mail prizes to the winners,” he added.

“Unfortunately, the traditional, in-person, indoor event is likely not the way to celebrate your workforce in 2020,” said Challenger.

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