

# **How to Plan an Employee Banquet**

*by Pamela Fay*

Your company is hosting a banquet. You've been given a vision, you have a budget, and you're in charge. Now what? Employee banquets are formal dinners or buffets typically held in restaurants, hotels, dance halls, lodges, or open air venues. With a little preparation, you can host an employee banquet that delights the guests, pleases the executive team, and preserves your sanity.

## **Step 1:**

Select three possible dates for the banquet and then work with your human resources department or key administrator to secure them. Give yourself at least three months, if possible. You may need more time for a holiday party. Ensure that there are no conflicts with other meetings, vacations schedules, and high priority projects. HR can also help you with headcount. From past experience, HR may also be able to give you an anticipated attendance rate.

## **Step 2:**

Find a location that is large enough to host the celebration and provide parking. To keep it simple, select a location that will also do the catering. Tour the location to make sure it has the wait staff, linens, service ware, table decorations, coat check, and any other provisions or services you require. Explore menus and costs to find one that will fit within your budget. Remember to include a vegetarian option.

## **Step 3:**

Send the invitation to guests once you have determined the location. If you have not secured a location two months in advance, send a preliminary invitation or a save-the-date request. Ask for an RSVP. In the notice, be sure to specify the purpose of the banquet, location, the dress code, and time of day. Be prepared to make several requests for responses to the invitation. You may not yet need an exact count for in-town guests, but if you plan to provide accommodations or travel arrangements for your out-of-towners, you'll want to make reservations early.

## **Step 4:**

Invite the keynote speaker and secure the band, or other entertainment you may want for the celebration. If you are planning a holiday party, plan with your theme in mind. Many companies like to have a photographer, if not a videographer, for these events. If you want to memorialize the occasion, be sure to book at least six weeks in advance. If the banquet includes an award ceremony, now is the time to order plaques, trophies and gifts.

## **Step 5:**

Provide a final count to the catering staff. Confirm all of your plans. Have the trophies and gifts arrived? Do the out-of-town guests have their travel information? Did new hires receive an invitation?

#### Step 6: Host

Arrive early on the day of the banquet. Check the hotel function board, if applicable, to insure that your event appears there. Locate the restrooms and the emergency exits. Inspect the banquet room to insure that everything is in place for dinner guests as well as for the speaker and entertainment. Meet with the photographer and finalize expectations. Put on your best smile and have a great evening!

#### Tips

To make your life easier, use a banquet facility. They have event planners on their end who can help ensure your success.

#### Resources:

<http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/lfdpg/checklist.html>

Land Stewardship Project: Local Foods Dinner Planning Checklist

<http://web.mit.edu/eventguide/basicevent/checklist.html>

Massachusetts Institute of Technology Campus Activities Complex: Basic Event Planning