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At company social events, office rules apply

That pretty little invitation to the company picnic this weekend might look fun and innocent, but don't be so naive. Company-sponsored social events are...

By [JANET H. CHO](#)
Newhouse News Service

That pretty little invitation to the company picnic this weekend might look fun and innocent, but don't be so naive.

Company-sponsored social events are rife with opportunities to torpedo your career.

"Anything that starts with 'company' first — 'company picnic,' 'company barbecue,' 'company baseball game' — means this is a business event" and that 9-to-5 workplace rules apply, said Marjorie Brody, founder and president of Brody Professional Development in Jenkintown, Pa. She has written 18 career-advancement books, including "Professional Impressions: Etiquette for Everyone, Every Day."

"People let down their guards because this is a party; drinking too much, getting sloppy in their conversation, getting overly friendly and making inappropriate remarks."

Remember that these are your colleagues, not your friends, so you can't go around doing whatever you please, she said.

"Many employees have lost their jobs because of bad behavior at a party," said Dick Blake, an etiquette consultant in Beachwood, Ohio.

Here, then, are some dos and don'ts for summer social outings with business associates:

- Do attend, even if only briefly. Your supervisors will notice if you skip out.

"Management often views these events as 'team building,' and if you don't participate, it may seem you

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are not a team player," said Paul Siddle, principal of the Executive Protocol Group in Naples, Fla., which offers business etiquette training.

- "Don't bring the dog," warns Lee E. Miller, co-founder of [YourCareerDoctors.com](#) and author of "UP: Influence, Power and the U Perspective: The Art of Getting What You Want."

"Only bring the kids if the boss has kids. If your spouse has no social graces ... leave the spouse home, too. The summer party is work, and you need to act as if it can have an effect on your career."

- Do dress to impress. You may be able to skip the ties and the pantyhose, but the company still expects you to look neat and polished. Take your cues from your boss, not your cubicle mates, Blake said.

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If your T-shirt looks like a wrinkled beer commercial, leave it at home, Brody said. "When the boss is considering who to promote, you don't want him or her to be thinking about you in a thong bikini," Miller said.

Don't forget to wear clean shoes or nice sandals. "You don't have to get a pedicure, but you do want your feet to be clean and moisturized," said etiquette coach Catherine Holloway, owner of Etiquette Consulting Services in Lyndhurst, Ohio.

- Do come prepared to enjoy the event. Whether it's an orchestra concert, a baseball game or a round of golf, take some interest in what's going on around

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you. Holloway suggests reading up on the sport so you know, for example, how the team is doing and who the pitcher is.

- Don't be a mooch. If it's a potluck, by all means bring enough for people to share. If not, ask the host or hostess what you can contribute to the party.

"Any time you get invited anywhere, you should always bring something," Holloway said. Her favorite trick is sending a flower centerpiece or a fruit basket the afternoon before the event.

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