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PLANNING THE HOLIDAYS:
A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

HR strategies to keep your business running smoothly & your team engaged



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Introduction:

The holiday season brings a mix of joy, reflection, and—let's be honest—logistical chaos. For business owners and HR professionals, this time of year often means juggling vacation requests, maintaining productivity, managing payroll around bank closures, and ensuring employees still feel valued and supported.

The end of the year can be both energizing and exhausting. Employees are balancing personal commitments and professional deadlines, while leaders are closing out budgets and preparing for the new year. Without a plan, even the strongest workplace can start to feel stretched thin.

That's why thoughtful preparation matters. With clear expectations, consistent communication, and genuine empathy, you can create a smooth, productive season that meets business needs while supporting employee well-being.





This guide explores practical ways to do just that. Inside, you'll find strategies for:

- **Planning proactively for time off and coverage**
- **Maintaining compliance with labor laws and payroll deadlines**
- **Keeping morale high and employees engaged through the holidays**

According to SHRM, nearly 60% of HR leaders say the last quarter of the year is their busiest—and the most challenging—for managing schedules and engagement. With the right strategy, the holidays can be more than just a logistical puzzle. They can become an opportunity to strengthen your company culture, reinforce trust, and end the year on a high note.



Start With Strategy

Holiday success starts long before the season begins. The earlier you plan, the easier it is to balance employee requests, customer needs, and business priorities. Thoughtful preparation now means fewer surprises later.

Begin by setting a planning window—ideally 60 to 90 days out. This gives teams time to submit PTO requests, review workloads, and anticipate client demands. If your business experiences a holiday rush, communicate any blackout dates early so employees can plan accordingly.

Transparent communication is just as important as timing. A company-wide reminder six weeks before the holidays—outlining PTO submission deadlines, holiday closures, and payroll adjustments—goes a long way. It not only prevents confusion but also builds trust by showing that leadership values clarity and fairness.



Encourage managers to play an active role, too. Department leaders should identify potential coverage gaps early and work with HR to fill them through cross-training, adjusted schedules, or temporary staffing support. A collaborative approach ensures no team is left short-handed during a critical period.

Finally, **be realistic about workload expectations.** If the fourth quarter is your busiest time, discuss goals and deadlines early to prevent last-minute crunches. The structure you create now allows your team more flexibility to celebrate the season later.

Tip: Send a company-wide reminder six weeks before the holidays outlining PTO deadlines, blackout dates, and any planned office closures. Clear communication today prevents stress tomorrow.



Managing Time-Off Requests Fairly & Legally

One of employers' most common holiday headaches is handling overlapping time-off requests. Balancing fairness, coverage, and compliance takes planning and consistency.

Start by reviewing your PTO policy to ensure it's clear, current, and easily accessible to employees. Spell out how requests are prioritized—whether on a first-come, first-served basis, by seniority, or through a rotation system. Whatever method you choose, consistency is key.

It's equally important to communicate approval timelines and decision-making criteria early. That transparency prevents employees from feeling blindsided and helps maintain trust.

From a compliance perspective, remember that holiday pay and overtime rules vary depending on employee classification and location. For example:

- Under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), private employers are not required to provide paid holidays. However, if a non-exempt employee works on a holiday, those hours count toward their total hours worked for the week.
- Some states, like Massachusetts and Rhode Island, have "blue laws" that require premium pay for certain holidays.
- If your workforce spans multiple states, ensure your HRIS or payroll provider automatically accounts for these variations.

Finally, document everything. Using a centralized platform like MyFrankCrum's time and scheduling tools creates a digital audit trail for PTO requests and approvals, which is essential for avoiding disputes or potential wage claims later.

Fairness isn't just about perception—it's about protection. When employees see that policies are applied equally, they're more likely to respect scheduling boundaries, stay engaged, and trust leadership decisions.

With scheduling under control, maintaining productivity becomes the next challenge.

> **Tip:** Keep accurate records. Consistent documentation protects both your company and your employees.



Maintaining Productivity During the Holidays

Keeping operations on track when half your team is out—or mentally checked out—can be challenging. But productivity during the holidays doesn't have to mean burnout. With the right planning, you can maintain efficiency and morale at the same time.

Start by identifying your core business functions that must continue without interruption, like payroll processing, customer service, or order fulfillment. Once those priorities are clear, determine which projects can be paused or scaled back until the new year. This helps your team focus on what truly matters during the busiest stretch of the year.

Next, look for opportunities to cross-train employees. Not only does cross-training help fill scheduling gaps, but it also encourages collaboration and professional growth. Employees who can step confidently into a peer's role feel more capable and connected to the business.

Technology can also lighten the load. Use automated scheduling, digital checklists, or time-tracking tools to streamline workflows and minimize confusion. A Deloitte study found that organizations leveraging HR technology for scheduling and communication saw a **20% boost in efficiency during seasonal fluctuations.**

And don't underestimate the power of flexibility. Hybrid work arrangements, adjusted shifts, or short-term staffing partnerships can keep operations running smoothly without overburdening full-time staff. Flexibility demonstrates trust—and trusted employees are more likely to stay focused and motivated.

Ultimately, maintaining productivity is about balance. When your team feels supported and empowered to manage their workload, they'll give their best efforts even in the busiest season.

Tip: Encourage teams to share coverage plans and workload priorities in advance. When everyone understands who's handling what, productivity stays high—even when the office is half full.

Compliance Check: Payroll, Holiday Pay, & Scheduling

Nothing can derail a calm holiday season faster than a payroll or compliance mistake. A missed payday or inaccurate wage calculation doesn't just affect morale—it can also expose your business to fines, penalties, and loss of trust.

Start with payroll timing. If a regularly scheduled payday falls on a federal banking holiday, adjust your processing schedule in advance to ensure direct deposits clear on time. Communicate any changes to employees early, especially if they affect holiday-week pay.

Double-check your holiday pay practices. While private employers aren't federally required to offer paid holidays, most do as part of their benefits strategy. If your policy includes premium pay for employees who work on holidays (for example, time-and-a-half), confirm that your payroll system calculates it correctly.

Ensure you understand how supplemental pay affects overtime calculations. Under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), paid time off—such as vacation or sick leave—does not count toward hours worked when determining overtime eligibility. Similarly, holiday pay is governed by company policy and may or may not contribute to total hours worked. Misclassifying these types of paid time can result in significant back-pay liabilities.

If you operate in multiple states, watch for variations in local labor laws. For instance, California has strict daily overtime requirements that may be triggered by altered holiday schedules.

Finally, take time to update your time-tracking systems before the holidays. Ensure all holiday dates, early closures, and special shifts are reflected accurately to prevent payroll and compliance reporting errors.

Payroll errors cost U.S. employers an estimated $8 billion annually in corrections and penalties, according to the Department of Labor. A short review today can prevent costly mistakes tomorrow—and keep your team confident in your payroll accuracy.



Tip: Review payroll calendars and system settings at least two weeks before holiday pay periods. Catching small issues early protects both compliance and employee trust.

Employee Engagement & Morale

The holidays are a time of celebration—but also, for many employees, a time of fatigue. Between year-end projects and personal obligations, motivation can dip right when businesses need their teams to stay focused. That's why intentionally nurturing morale during this season matters.

Start with appreciation.

Recognition doesn't have to mean lavish bonuses or elaborate parties (though those are nice when possible). A simple, sincere "thank you" from leadership or a handwritten card acknowledging effort can have a lasting impact. In fact, a Gallup study found that employees who feel recognized are **five times more likely to stay engaged at work.**

If your company hosts a holiday gathering, **think inclusively**. The goal is to bring people together—not to make anyone feel left out. Design celebrations that align with your company's culture and values, with a focus on making every employee feel included and appreciated.

Encouraging participation.

Team-building activities can also help reinforce connection. Many companies organize volunteer opportunities, donation drives, or themed office events. These activities remind employees that they're part of something bigger and can even strengthen company culture when paired with your values.

Flexibility as a powerful engagement tool.

Whenever possible, allow adjusted hours or remote work options during the holiday season. Studies show that flexible scheduling is one of the top three factors contributing to employee satisfaction. It also builds trust—a cornerstone of strong workplace culture.

The power of shared success.

Invite department leaders to highlight small wins from the year, share stories of teamwork, or recognize outstanding employees in company-wide messages. These reminders of shared purpose can reignite motivation heading into the new year.

Keep an eye on equity.

For employees who work during the holidays, make sure they feel just as valued as those who are off. Simple gestures like catered lunches, additional paid time off later, or leadership visits to thank on-site staff can reinforce that appreciation.

When morale is high, productivity naturally follows. By making employees feel seen, supported, and included, you not only end the year on a positive note—you set the tone for a stronger start to the next one.

Tip: Review payroll calendars and system settings at least two weeks before holiday pay periods. Catching small issues early protects both compliance and employee trust.





Hosting Safe & Inclusive Holiday Celebrations

For many workplaces, a holiday party is the highlight of the year; it's a chance to relax, connect, and celebrate team success. But while these events can build camaraderie, they also come with important HR and compliance considerations. The key is to create a celebration that's both fun and safe for everyone involved.

Start with inclusivity. Avoid assuming that everyone celebrates the same holidays or traditions. Calling your event a year-end celebration or team appreciation party helps ensure all employees feel welcome. Consider offering a variety of menu options and planning activities that celebrate shared success rather than specific holidays or beliefs.

Attendance should always be voluntary. Even if your company culture is social, some employees may prefer not to attend for personal or religious reasons, and that's okay. Participation should never be tied to performance, recognition, or advancement opportunities.

Before the event, send a friendly reminder of company policies and behavioral expectations. Reinforce that harassment, discrimination, or inappropriate conduct won't be tolerated—whether the event is held on-site or off the clock. This isn't about dampening the fun; it's about protecting both employees and the organization.

Lastly, make sure leaders set the tone. When managers model appropriate, respectful behavior, it encourages employees to do the same. The best celebrations are those where everyone feels comfortable and valued.



Tip: Send a short "party etiquette" email before your event. A light, friendly reminder about expectations, inclusivity, and professional conduct can prevent misunderstandings and help everyone enjoy the celebration responsibly.



Alcohol, Conduct, & Employer Liability

Holiday gatherings can boost morale, but when alcohol is involved, employers need to take extra precautions. A festive toast can quickly become a liability if clear boundaries aren't set. By planning ahead, you can help your team celebrate safely while protecting your business.

If your event includes alcohol, limit consumption and offer alternatives. Consider using drink tickets or restricting alcohol service to a set time period. And always provide plenty of food and non-alcoholic options—keeping hydration and nutrition in balance helps reduce overconsumption.

Transportation should also be part of your plan. Arrange for ride-share vouchers, taxis, or designated drivers to ensure everyone gets home safely. The gesture not only demonstrates care for employees but also helps reduce the risk of post-event incidents.

Tip: Treat alcohol service like any other workplace risk: anticipate it, plan for it, and communicate expectations early. When in doubt, skip alcohol altogether or choose a daytime event to minimize risk.

Remind employees that workplace policies (including harassment, discrimination, and respectful behavior) still apply at company-sponsored events. While the setting may be more casual, professional conduct remains essential. Make it clear that violations could still lead to corrective action if necessary.

Finally, make sure leaders lead by example. Managers should model responsible drinking behavior and be prepared to intervene discreetly if someone crosses a line. The presence of leadership sets the tone for professionalism, even at a celebration.



Holiday Stress & Well-Being



The holidays can be emotionally and mentally taxing, even in the most cheerful workplaces. Employees are juggling family obligations, financial pressures, and year-end deadlines—all while trying to stay productive. According to the American Psychological Association, **38% of employees report feeling increased stress during the holiday season**, often due to workload and financial strain.

As an employer, you can't eliminate every source of stress, but you can help ease the pressure and foster a supportive environment.

Start by acknowledging reality.

Recognize that not everyone experiences the holidays the same way. For some, it's a joyful season; for others, it can bring anxiety or grief. A simple note from leadership expressing empathy and understanding can normalize these feelings and help employees feel seen.

Encourage the use of Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)

or similar benefits. Many employees either forget these programs exist or aren't sure what they offer. Remind your team that confidential counseling, financial planning, and wellness resources are available. Visibility is key—consider posting reminders in common areas or sending a short company-wide message with links to resources.

Next, promote healthy boundaries.

Encourage managers to model balance by taking time off themselves and avoiding after-hours emails when possible. Leadership behavior sets the tone—if employees see their supervisors logging off and recharging, they'll feel more comfortable doing the same.

You can also reinforce well-being through small but meaningful gestures:

- Host optional mindfulness or wellness breaks (even brief virtual sessions).
- Offer flexible start or end times to help employees balance personal responsibilities.
- Consider a "meeting-free" afternoon during the final workweek of the year to give teams space to catch up or decompress.

If your business stays busy through the holidays, keep morale high by rotating workloads, offering free meals or snacks, or introducing lighthearted competitions. Even simple gestures can lift spirits and build a sense of togetherness.

Ultimately, supporting employee well-being isn't just the right thing to do—it's also good business. Studies show that organizations prioritizing well-being see 23% higher profitability and lower turnover (Gallup). When employees feel cared for as people, not just as workers, they bring their best selves to the job—even during the most hectic weeks of the year.

Tip: Encourage your managers to check in regularly with their teams during the holidays. A quick conversation about workload or stress levels can make a big difference in preventing burnout before it starts.



Post-Holiday Wrap-Up and Reflection

When the decorations come down and business returns to normal, the most effective leaders take time to pause, reflect, and prepare for what's next. The post-holiday period isn't just about catching up on work—it's a prime opportunity to capture lessons that can make next year smoother, more efficient, and more employee-focused.

Start by **gathering feedback** from both managers and employees. What worked well this season? Where did scheduling or communication challenges occur? A brief survey or department debrief can reveal valuable insights that might otherwise go unnoticed. Encourage honest feedback by framing it as an improvement exercise, not a critique.

Next, **evaluate policy effectiveness.** Review how your PTO approvals, overtime scheduling, or remote-work accommodations held up during the holidays. If certain policies caused confusion or stress, this is the perfect time to update them before the next busy period.

Consider creating a short "Holiday Operations Review" summary for leadership or HR records. Document employee feedback, attendance trends, customer service impacts, and any unexpected issues that arose. These notes will become a valuable planning reference next year and demonstrate proactive leadership.

It's also important to **recognize standout contributions**. Employees who stepped up to cover shifts, took on extra tasks, or kept operations running deserve acknowledgment. Whether through a company-wide shout-out, a thank-you note from leadership, or a small token of appreciation, recognizing effort reinforces a culture of teamwork and gratitude.

Finally, take time to **reset and refocus**. Encourage your team to ease back into regular routines and set fresh goals for the new year. This could mean hosting a short kickoff meeting to celebrate the company's wins and share what's ahead, or scheduling one-on-one conversations between managers and team members to discuss personal development goals.

Reflection isn't just about looking back—it's about using what you've learned to build better systems and a stronger culture going forward. When you make reflection a habit, you transform the holiday season from a stress test into a source of growth.

Tip: Schedule your post-holiday debrief before the season even begins. When review dates are set in advance, feedback stays timely, and lessons learned remain fresh for next year's planning.

Expert Guidance When You Need It

Planning for the holidays can be complicated—balancing compliance, communication, and culture is no small task. But you don't have to do it alone.

FrankCrum's team of HR professionals is here to help you navigate every season with confidence. Our dedicated consultants—known as our FrankAdvice Team—offer one-on-one guidance on topics like employee relations, compliance updates, policy development, and more. Whether you need advice on managing PTO requests or crafting inclusive celebrations, our experts are ready to support you.

If you're already a FrankCrum client, reach out to your FrankAdvice representative for tailored HR guidance and practical resources to prepare for the months ahead.

If you're not a FrankCrum client, now's the perfect time to learn how we can help you simplify HR, reduce risk, and create a workplace where employees can thrive year-round.

Connect with us at frankcrum.com/contact-us to learn more.



Why FrankCrum

Although FrankCrum clients appreciate our long and successful track record, financial stability, technology capabilities, and the wide range of services we offer, what we hear most often is that they appreciate being able to speak with a live person who gives them straight answers to what may sometimes be difficult questions.

That's the way we do business - one person at a time, one client at a time. It's literally part of our DNA as the FrankCrum family of businesses: what we call "A Family of Employer Solutions."

Our company history began in 1981, when Frank W. Crum, Jr. and his father started offering temporary staffing services, with a deep commitment to the success of business owners. Because of that commitment, we have expanded our professional offerings over time as clients partnered with us to help them grow.

Today, that family of businesses - still owned and operated by Frank Crum, Jr. and now his son, Matt and daughter, Haley - offer HR services through FrankCrum PEO, workers' compensation and general liability insurance through Frank Winston Crum Insurance and staffing services through FrankCrum Staffing. You'll find the same operational philosophy in all three companies; Frank refers to it as "doing the right things for the right reasons."

It boils down to this: Running a business can be hard. Managing your human resources program shouldn't be. Let us know how we can help.

To learn how FrankCrum can help your business,
call 800-277-1620 to schedule a consultation.

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Phone: 1-800-277-1620
Address: 100 South Missouri Avenue, Clearwater, FL 33756