

The OFFICE PARTY

Level: intermediate and up

Aim: a speaking mingle activity with emphasis on oral fluency; students practise making small talk at an office social event and share secrets

Language point: expressions to use for telling a secret or registering surprise, workplace vocabulary; rhythm and stress when giving important information.

Materials: Cut up the role cards and have one for each student. If you have more than eight students in the class, make copies of the last two cards (the ones with no gossip on them) for every other student in the class.

Note: This activity is very similar to the Wedding Party. If your learners enjoy the Office Social event, you could do the Wedding Party on another day. See the Speaking Lessons section at www.onestopenglish.com for this activity.

Warmer

Ask the learners if any of them work in an office. Have they ever been to an office party? What was it like? Do learners think it's a good idea to have parties where they work? Does anybody in the class NOT like going to parties or social events with the people they work with?

Stage One

Tell the class that they have all been invited to an office end of the year party. Each person will have a different role. Explain that the President of the company is not in the role play, the students must imagine that he or she will be arriving later. This means that everybody can gossip about work and complain about the President! The objective of the role play is to find out as much gossip about the company as possible. Make sure you explain GOSSIP (uncountable noun) and TO GOSSIP (intransitive verb).

Stage Two

Tell them that some of them will have gossip to share, and others not. Before students begin the role play, tell them that you want them to follow these guidelines each time they talk to someone new.

- 1) Introduce yourself and greet the other person.
- 2) Ask some questions to make small talk (see appendix A below)
- 3) If you have some gossip, tell it using the expression provided on your role card.
- 4) Listen to the other person's gossip and react (see Appendix B below).

When students are ready, give out the role cards, tell them to stand up and begin mingling.

Stage Three

While students are doing the role play, have some background music playing (some baroque classical music or "cocktail party" music is good for this). Circulate and take notes of language errors good use of the target language, but don't correct at this point.

Stage Four

Ask students to sit down again. What did they find out? Elicit things from the groups. Do a quick feedback on the errors or language you took notes on. Then ask students to call out their pieces of gossip again, using the sentence stems on their role cards. Write these on the board. You can also use this time to review any work vocabulary that came up during the role play (e.g. jobs, to be laid off, buy out...)

Stage Five

Explain that in English, people usually slow down when they are giving some important information or a surprise. That's because the important information (verbs or nouns) often will come at the end of the sentence. Ask them to turn to a partner and tell their gossip again, using one of the sentence stems on the board (from stage four), but this time to slow down, or even pause, just before they give the information. When they have done this, write the following sentence stem on the board:

Listen to what I have to say, because I am not going to say it again...

Tell the students that you want them to try to say something surprising to their partner, but beginning with these words and pausing. Give them an example (think of something surprising!). Then have them do it in pairs, working on rhythm. Were they surprised?

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ROLE CARD

You are Sheri Grau, the receptionist. You work at the front desk. You know most people in the company. You know that the President has parties in his office late at night after people have left work.

Expressions to use:
I shouldn't really say this but...

ROLE CARD

You are Malcolm Singh, the accountant. You know that the company is very much in debt and that the President is getting a very large financial bonus this year.

Expressions to use:
You may not believe this but...

ROLE CARD

You are Andrea Penedes, the secretary to the President.
You know that the President has a serious problem with alcohol and likes to have parties in his office late at night. You also know that he had an affair with the last secretary.

Expressions to use:
Please don't tell anyone I told you...

ROLE CARD

You are George Griffith, the Human Resources manager.
You know that ten people are going to be laid off in January because of financial problems with the company.

Expressions to use:
I know this isn't the time to talk about it, but...

ROLE CARD

You are Patricia Mendez. You are a computer technician.
You know that the President's last secretary left because she was secretly pregnant. You don't know who the father was.

Expressions to use:
Well, I heard that...

ROLE CARD

You are Bernie Takana. You are a visitor to the company and have been invited to the party.
You know that your company is planning to buy out this company next year.

Expressions to use: I'm telling you this in confidence...

ROLE CARD

(Choose your own name and job before you start)
You work for the company. You don't like your job very much. You like to complain about your work and want to find out gossip about the company.

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Appendix A: Making small talk at the office party

How long have you been with the company?

What's your job? / What do you do?

Wow, this year has gone by really quickly.

I can't stand these office parties.

This is really good; would you like to try some?

Appendix B: Reacting to surprising news

Really!

No way!

I can't believe it!

You're kidding!

That's terrible!