

Drinking Dilemma

James loves to host parties at his house. He also organizes wine and cheese receptions at the company he owns as well as birthday parties for his employees. But lately, James has been thinking about not serving alcohol anymore.

James enjoys celebrating his friends and employees. There is something valuable about the sort of “bonding” that happens when people hang out with drinks; it feels like there is an additional layer of intimacy that is important for developing relationships. Alcohol also tends to put people in a better mood, makes their jokes seem funnier, and loosens their tongues. It certainly seems to James like everyone has more fun when alcoholic drinks are widely available.

These benefits seem minor though in comparison to the potential risks. James is especially worried about sexual harassment happening at one of his parties. He knows that inappropriate jokes and gestures are not uncommon when people are drinking. Even offensive jokes about someone’s race, disability, or class have been made in the past. James knows a couple of his employees who have stopped attending his parties because of such incidents.

Alcohol can also lead to sexual contact happening faster and with less thinking. James knows of at least one unintended pregnancy that took place as a result of alcohol consumed at a party he organized, and plenty of sexual contact that one or both parties later regretted. Alcohol can also cause violent behavior – such as fights or domestic violence incidents. What he does worry about are driving accidents, especially since he’s seen more than a few people leave his parties a bit too tipsy to drive safely.

James’ concerns run pretty deep. However, he doesn’t want to be paternalistic. It’s not his problem if people have unprotected sex, make offensive jokes, or drive dangerously. He’s certainly not responsible for what they do. And most of his friends and coworkers drink lightly and responsibly at these parties anyway.

James is also considering giving up alcohol himself for some of these same reasons. He doesn’t want to do something he’d regret later. He’s also realizing that he spends way too much money on alcohol, and the money can surely be used for something better. But for now, the main decision he’s struggling with is that of serving alcohol at parties and receptions he organizes.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Should James stop serving alcohol at his parties? Why or why not?
2. What are the best reasons for and against buying and serving alcohol to others?
3. Whose responsibility is it to take measures to mitigate the negative effects of alcohol: the consumer, the vendor, the society, or some combination thereof?

