

Chapter 2

When to Host Your Party

There is a good reason why you should select a date three weeks away for your first party: it will give time to build your guest list.

The Party Runway

Think of a runway at an airport. It exists to give the plane time to build up speed and take off. In the context of hosting a party, the runway gives you plenty of time to invite people. Plus, advance notice makes it more likely that your guests will have an open schedule and be able to attend.



A three-week runway allows you to do most of the work in advance to guarantee great attendance.

The runway also gives you time to buy a few necessary supplies like basic drinks and some snacks. But don't panic about preparation yet. We're just making a runway right now, not a whole airport.

Three weeks is the sweet spot. It provides you with plenty of time to build a solid list of RSVPs. You'll message a few close connections, create a simple online event page, lock in those first RSVPs, and then send invites to other prospective guests. Upcoming chapters will cover each of these steps in detail. For now, just know that a long party runway will increase your party's attendance and decrease your stress.

How *Not* to Plan a Party

As I mentioned, I haven't always been a natural host. Years ago, on my journey to becoming a party professional, I was attending a mindfulness class in New York City. It was there that I met Olivia, a friend of a friend who was successful in the fashion industry. I loved her style and was incredibly curious about her world and network. After chatting for a few minutes, I knew that I wanted to see her again.

What better way to get to know her than by inviting her to a cocktail party I was thinking of organizing?

She was excited. We added each other on social media and I said I'd add her to the Facebook event I had already made for the party. To my delight she said she couldn't wait to come. Unfortunately, I screwed up.

Yes, I was *thinking* about organizing a party, but I hadn't done any of the groundwork. I stood there outside the class with calming Zen music playing in the background and as I added her to the Facebook event on my phone, I realized what was about to happen. I felt a sudden flush of embarrassment.

I hadn't yet reached out to my Core Group of trusted friends and colleagues (you'll learn more about what this is and why it is important soon). The event I was inviting her to showed only one other confirmed attendee: me.

From her perspective, it must have looked as though I was pulling a sleazy trick to get her to come to my apartment.

When I got home, I knew I needed to put together a party with less than a week's notice. I invited as many friends as I could and I begged them to attend. I rushed out and bought supplies.

It was a scramble, but I did it. Olivia attended and had a great time and we ended up becoming friends. Thankfully I didn't look like too much of a weirdo. I was lucky that time. But the whole experience was way more stressful than it needed to be.



Do: Decrease the party stress by planning ahead.



Do: Invite interesting new people you meet.



Don't: Invite them before you've prepared the party runway.

The Best Day Criteria

Host your first party on a non-busy weeknight. Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday nights work best for me. Choose a day when most people you plan to invite are probably available. This makes it easier for them to say Yes to your invitation.

I always avoid Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights because I don't want to risk schedule conflicts for my guests. Sunday tends to be a family or rest day, so I skip that day, too. And steer clear of long weekends and holidays. All of these are what I call "heavyweight" days.



Do: Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday night.



Don't: Thursday, Friday, Saturday, or Sunday night.



Don't: Long weekends or holidays.

Heavyweight Days: Why They're Your Enemy

My friend Steve decided to host his first party on one of the most heavyweight days of the year: New Year's Eve. New Year's Eve is like the World Championship of Parties. It's not the night to throw a party unless you *really* know what you're doing and plan well in advance.

To make matters worse, Steve sent out his invitations by mass email using an online service. I found mine in my spam folder in late December. He didn't even text me—one of his best friends—to invite me individually or remind me to RSVP.

When I called him, it was clear he was stressed. He'd invested a lot of time and money into his planning and was worried about whether people were going to show up. His hosting confidence was shaken before the event even happened.

 **Party Pro Tip:** *Don't try to compete with busy social calendars. Host your party when people are less likely to have plans.*

Steve managed to pull it off, but the party didn't live up to its potential. There were fewer guests than he'd hoped for, and he'd spent too much time and money renting a space and getting decorations. You don't want this to happen to you, so don't pick a heavyweight day for your first party.



Avoid schedule conflicts for your guests. Host your party on a less-busy day.

Ask the Party Professional

Q: Should parties always take place on weekdays and at night?

A: I've found these days and times are easier to organize for a 2-hour event. People's schedules tend to be more flexible during the week and after work. But these recommendations aren't set in stone. What worked in my research in a big city may not work for you. Those with kids or who live in smaller towns might prefer to gather on weekends. Plan an event you feel comfortable hosting and be thoughtful if departing from my formula—especially for your first few parties.

Ask the Party Professional

Q: Can I use the formula in this book for a party I've already scheduled next week? Like a sports event, birthday party, or work function?

A: I don't recommend it, and here's why: your guests didn't sign up for a structured cocktail party. They RSVP'd to watch football or whatever you invited them to do. If you greet them with nachos and name tags, they're going to be confused and might not be willing participants. The best way to learn this formula is by planning a party specifically for the purpose of practicing what's in the book.

But if you're reading this to help you upgrade a party only a few days away, you can still do several key things to make your gathering better. Jump ahead to chapter 5 to see the magic of name tags, then skip to chapter 9 to learn about best practices for your reminder messages. I've posted more thoughts about how to improve an upcoming party at www.party.pro/tips.

Drinks Only. No Dinner Parties.

Do not position this as a dinner party. Dinner parties are too hard for new hosts to manage. They take a lot of work. You must finely curate the guest list, order lots of supplies, cook the food, lead the entire conversation, and entertain longer.



Party Pro Tip: *Serve drinks and snacks only. Make your first party a success by keeping it simple.*

I hosted dozens of dinner parties in my quest to find the perfect formula to build relationships. But I stopped doing them when I realized that cocktail parties are so much easier to master. Cocktail parties will give you the same or even better relationship-building results than dinner parties because you can do them more often and you can invite more people. The impact is the same and the conversations are often livelier. Keep it simple and don't do dinner.

What Time Works Best?

Start at 7:00 p.m. and end at 9:00 p.m.

An event that starts at 7:00 p.m. gives people time to finish their workday and come straight to your party or eat dinner before arriving. They also go home early, so you can do it on a weekday without feeling guilty.

While 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. works best for me, I know a few hosts who throw parties from 8:00 to 10:00 or even 6:30 to 8:30. After your first party, you can experiment to find the time block that works best for you and your community.

If you want to have a bit of fun with the start and end time, you can pick a random minute around 7:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. Sol Orwell, the co-founder of the scientific research database Examine.com, started hosting parties because he wanted to commiserate with his fellow entrepreneurs in Toronto. He always uses quirky start and end times like 6:57 p.m.

to 9:02 p.m. It sets his parties apart from boring networking events, and I have a hunch the novelty might encourage people to show up on time.

Party People in Action: Nagina Sethi Abdulla

Founder of MasalaBody.com in Jersey City, New Jersey

Nick: Why did you decide to start hosting parties?

Nagina: I wanted to feel like my town was “home” and that my kids and I could enjoy our time and have a community to learn from and spend time with. I moved here when they were in preschool. With my work and entrepreneurship-focused lifestyle, I had not made time to meet new people and make friends.

Nick: What have you gained by hosting parties?

Nagina: I created so many new connections. When I go out in town—to the store, a restaurant, or a school event—it's much more common that I see someone I know. I also gained confidence that I'm adding value to my community.

Nick: What's the biggest challenge or fear you've faced hosting parties?

Nagina: Before my first party I had a real fear about putting myself out there and hosting. There was so much possible rejection if people didn't come. What surprised me was that when I invited people personally like this book teaches, they got really excited to come. Even if they were busy or said no, they appreciated my invitation.

Provide Clear Start and Finish Times

Two hours is the perfect length of time for a cocktail party. It's long enough for people to meet and talk, yet short enough to prevent the party from fizzling out. Keep your party concise in order to:

- Encourage guests to show up on time and not be fashionably late.
- Make your parties easier to say Yes to, especially on a weekday.
- Reduce your stress by setting expectations for when guests should leave.

The clear ending time tells guests that your party isn't an opportunity for a blowout or a crazy long night. Everyone needs to get up for work, family, or school the next day.

You might worry about what to do at the end. If your guests want to hang out and continue socializing after your party is over, congratulations! That means you've done a great job creating connections. But that chatter and reluctance to leave doesn't mean you need to continue hosting. Recommend a nearby bar or restaurant that guests can go to, then finish the party at the time you stated in the invitation. You're free to join them at the next venue or tidy up your space and rest. You'll learn more about how to end your party gracefully and on a high note in chapter 14.



CHAPTER CHECKLIST

- Confirm your date. Ideally a Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday evening three weeks out.
- Set your two-hour time block. I suggest 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
- Don't invite anyone just yet. You'll learn who to invite and exactly how to invite them in chapter 5.