

Romance in the Workplace: Flirting With Disaster?



Romantic partners at work

Because we spend so much time at work, it is not surprising that we meet romantic partners, and sometimes future spouses, at the office. Most human resources professionals are called upon to address the issue of workplace romance at some point. Like so many things, there are pros and cons to office relationships:

Pros

- The office is full of people with similar interests.
- Coworkers who like each other can provide support during busy or stressful times.
- Romantic partners at work have more time together, and may even be more productive.

Cons

- Romance carried out at work can impact the entire workplace.
- Personal time off may increase when employees need a break in the relationship or when co-workers experience stress as a side effect of a broken romance.
- Manager-employee relationships may end in legal troubles, as issues of favoritism and questions about the “welcome-ness” of the relationship may arise



BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) American Time Use Survey, we spend an average of 7.6 hours per day on work or work-related activities. No other waking activity, such as sports or leisure, comes close in time spent.

Workplace romance is not always workplace harassment, but it can be fraught with peril. How might coworker romance impact their work team? Will productivity and engagement remain strong if two individuals end a relationship and continue to work together? Should you attempt to limit relationships from occurring in the first place?

Consider these suggestions for reducing your risk of workplace relationship tension:

1. Develop a nepotism philosophy that fits your organization's culture. You may want to prohibit family members from direct reporting relationships, but a complete ban on hiring any family members could run afoul of some state discrimination laws. Without a clear business need for such a policy, a blanket prohibition on hiring family members would be unlikely to hold up to legal scrutiny.
2. Conduct training on harassment or offensive behavior policies. Make sure all employees know the company's attitude regarding harassment, and the steps to follow to report a problem.
3. Ensure managers and supervisors understand the potential liability if they are involved in a workplace romance.
4. Develop a policy that prohibits individuals who are dating to be in the same department or have a direct reporting relationship.
5. Place reasonable limits on fraternization between managers and supervisors and employees. Employees should never feel coerced into social situations that make them uncomfortable with someone to whom they report, or anyone else in authority.
6. Encourage disclosures of relationships so the organization can take proactive steps to minimize problems.

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Managers and supervisors should understand the complexities of this issue, and employees should know what to do if a romance—their own or a coworker's—is affecting work performance.

As employees get ready to order flowers and chocolates for Valentine's Day, take a moment to review your policies, update as appropriate, and make sure you are responding effectively to claims of harassment, fraternization, and retaliation.

Need help with your workplace relationships policy? MRA's [HR Hotline Advisors](#) can help you!

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