

Busier lifestyles have made finding romance more difficult today than in recent memory. With communication technology often reducing human interaction to abbreviated text messages and shorthand emails, many find the office to be a rare exception where they are still able to engage in meaningful, face-to-face interaction with others. Romance at work can be a natural consequence.

Many companies suffer productivity losses from workplace romance issues, which is why policies against workplace romance sometimes exist.

The following are the top concerns from a 2006 poll of HR practitioners according to research from the IRS Employment Review:

- Potential conflicts of interest
- Complaints of favoritism
- Effect on productivity
- Effect on employee morale
- Retaliation if relationship ends
- Claims for sexual harassment
- Unprofessional relationships

If you are considering an office romance, or are currently involved in one, it is important to consider the potentially negative effects that it may have on both your career and your intraoffice relationships.

Particularly dangerous is any relationship between supervisor and subordinate in which one individual may have influence over the compensation and promotion of the other. This creates risk for everyone concerned if the relationship goes south. The transfer of one of the parties in order to remove him or her from the influence of the other is a smart move.

Vowing to keep things professional may seem reasonable in theory, but it does nothing to reduce the perception of favoritism. No matter how legitimate, any pay raise or promotion granted to the subordinate in the relationship will always be seen by others as preferential treatment.

Relationships between coworkers who are peers can also have negative side effects. Because work no longer provides a buffer between personal and professional lives, problems within the relationship can boil over into the workplace, especially with employees who work closely together.

Coworkers who are in a relationship may also become embroiled in workplace controversies on behalf of their significant other out of a sense of loyalty. This tendency can unnecessarily escalate workplace

conflict and increase the stress of both individuals within the relationship.

As with all things in life, no romance is a guaranteed path to success and happiness. Broken office romances can create a host of resulting problems that can make the workplace an extremely unpleasant place to work for both the estranged parties and any coworkers who may be forced to tiptoe around awkward situations.

Even if there is no policy concerning workplace romance in your organization, the work culture should still play a role in how you proceed.

If you are considering a workplace relationship or are already in an ongoing relationship with a coworker, you should have a plan firmly in place to deal with negative consequences that may arise from it. The following is a list of questions that you should discuss jointly in order to choose the best possible course of action:

1. Will this relationship subject us to disciplinary action?
2. Are we going to be open about our relationship with others?
3. Will this relationship make it necessary for one person to transfer to a different department or seek another job?
4. How will we deal with our personal issues while at work? How will we respond to criticism of this relationship?
5. Will this relationship harm either of us professionally?
6. Is this relationship ethical?
7. Will this relationship create tension or jealousy if one of us experiences more success at work than the other?
8. Do either of us have access to confidential information that we cannot share with the other?
9. Will we be able to remain cordial and professional if this relationship ends?

