



HR Examiner

Examining practical HR issues business owners and managers encounter every day

Blending Business and Pleasure

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Romantic Tips

Here are some ideas when romance begins to interfere with your work setting:

- ▶ Decide whether you want or need a Romance in the Workplace policy.
- ▶ Establish and communicate clear guidelines for expected behavior and

Too Close For Comfort

With Valentine's Day approaching, I had the fortune of being interviewed by Joyce Rosenberg of Associated Press in NYC on the topic of dating in the workplace. The fun part of these interviews is knowing that your "words of wisdom" will be shared in hundreds of on-line and print newspapers across the country.



To read the complete article click [HERE](#):

Of course, our discussion on the topic went far beyond the few sound bites in the article. For many

definitions for professionalism in the workplace.

▶ If you witness any inappropriate romantic behavior, which can range from knowing looks to blatant inappropriate sexual behavior, take immediate action. Don't procrastinate.

▶ If you are informed by an observer of behavior making another employee uncomfortable, don't dismiss it. Share this information with the individuals, without sharing the complainant's identity, and clearly present what you expect in the future as well as the ramifications are of continued problematic behavior.

▶ Don't play romantic

of us, these sound bites ring very true and we have tales to tell of how workplace romance has impacted our workplaces.

First, let me clearly state my disclaimer – I met my husband at work. Since that occurred nearly 30 years ago, and we're still telling the tale, I understand the issue from its many varied sides: as an employee, as an internal HR manager and as a consultant.

The reality is that people meet at work and start relationships. According to Career Journal, 40% of employees have been in workplace romances. So, employers prohibiting dating will have a rough time enforcing their policies. The key for management is to understand what issues arise from workplace relationships and how to ensure that professionalism is maintained before, during and after.

I've assisted clients where an employee couldn't take "no" for an answer and repeatedly asked a coworker out, sent her emails, hung out at her desk. Even though rejection is tough to take, this employee crossed the line and shifted from infatuation to harassment.

I've had clients where employees and bosses were in relationships, where dating couples brought their

counselor.

- ▶ Be sure to have a clearly written harassment policy in place.
- ▶ Train your managers on how to handle harassment complaints.
- ▶ Train your employees on the importance of notifying management of harassment concerns.
- ▶ Be a role model of appropriate workplace behavior
- ▶ Hold your managers accountable for appropriate verbal and physical communication.
- ▶ Don't play favorites, allowing some individuals more latitude regarding professional behavior than others.
- ▶ Define and

personal lives into work and everyone got sucked into the soap-opera of their relationship, where romances were too visible and where break-ups destroyed the team.

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The Heart of the Matter.....

...is what you as an employer/manager do when you see a workplace relationship affecting your workplace.

If two individuals are in a reporting relationship, there is a 100% chance that this relationship is having an adverse impact. Even in family businesses led by a husband and wife, there are ramifications to these relationships. So, while I won't suggest in this latter case that one employee leave the workplace, it is still important to create clear boundaries between what occurs at home and what occurs at work. Otherwise you are creating unnecessary stress on your employees.

When there's a personal relationship compounded by a reporting relationship, coworkers usually feel stress, are tense about communications, and frequently feel that favoritism exists. I typically recommend that one of the two in a reporting relationship be removed from the situation, and

communicate what you determine to be a terminatable offense regarding inappropriate behavior.

- ▶ Be consistent.
- ▶ When in doubt, get outside consulting or legal help.

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sometimes this unfortunately results in one individual leaving the company. Certainly, if you know of a romantic relationship before you move employees into this situation, don't believe them when they claim it won't affect anything. They may have good intentions, and it may even work for them, but it typically doesn't work for others.

If two employees are in a relationship and they work in different departments or rarely encounter each other at work, there may be no issues at all. In this case, do nothing. There's no sense to getting involved until you have to. If you have other concerns with these employees' performance, then you may want to provide them an overview of what you consider appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

Of course, if you get any inkling that employees are uncomfortable with how a workplace romance is affecting them, you must take swift action. The last thing you want is for a preventable situation to turn into a harassment claim. You need to be explicitly clear in communicating what is and isn't appropriate in your workplace, the impact that it's having on morale, productivity, communication, etc. While many managers tend to tread lightly when confronting employees, this is not the time to hint at appropriate behavior. You need to take a direct, timely approach.

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