

# Relationships at work: what's love got to do with it?



Quite a lot actually. In case you hadn't noticed, it's that time of year again. Love is in the air, or should I say, in the office. With over 70% of single employees becoming romantically involved with someone on the job at some point in their careers, today's workplace has become the new "singles bar". In fact, the workplace has also become the number one place for married men and women to meet affair partners and conduct extramarital affairs. I suppose it's not surprising seeing as we spend a third or more of our lives at work. But for employers, the office romance can make for dangerous ground. Handled well, it can lead to a relationship. Handled badly, it can lead to a lawsuit for harassment.

The HR Dept says: *"While relationships between colleagues are commonplace, it is important for employers to try to restrict activities that are harmful to the business. It is your responsibility to make the company policy on harassment clear to all employees, and if you don't have one, you need to generate one right now."*

The difficulty comes in distinguishing when flirting crosses the line to become harassment. If an employee is not interested in, or receptive to, an advance from another employee, it should end there. Playing around, banter, etc. are appropriate preludes to dating, but only if the receiving party is comfortable with them. In most cases, mutually-agreeable relationships pose no danger to the company. However, there are instances where they are inappropriate. For instance, The HR Dept suggests, *"it is never a good idea for a manager to be romantically involved with a subordinate in their own organisation. Situations such as this should be clearly spelled out in the company policy as inappropriate and subject to corrective action"*.

The HR Dept specialises in advising small and medium sized businesses on all employment issues. Here are their 3 top tips for managing love in the office.

- Have a clear policy on what someone should do if they have a relationship at work.
- Treat everyone like adults, not like renegade teenagers.
- Have the tissues ready, should it end like a teenage romantic crush!