



**INSIGHT LEAD...**

**OFFICE ROMANCE!**  
**Is it worth it?**

## OFFICE ROMANCE! Is it worth it?

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Workplace romance is by no means limited to people at the same level as the organization's hierarchy. It could take place between junior staff and someone from senior management. There could be a fine line between what passes for a harmless piece of flirting and sexual harassment. As a result, some organizations have specific guidelines for their staff as to what is acceptable behaviour and what is not in terms of romantic relationships at the office.

Office romance or what is called corporate affair in some quarters is as old as work itself. It is a short or long term romantic relationship between colleagues who often work in the same office, project location or business. In some places, office romance is not encouraged as it is considered to be a threat to the total well-being of the organization.

Such organizations see office romance as containing the potential for abuse, dysfunctional conflict, unholy alliances, and a damaging distraction. In some situations, one of the lovers ends up leaving the organization to make life easier for their partner. This may be a result of unsavory rumors, hurtful gossip or pressure from management.

They say every rose has its thorn. The danger or thorn that comes with office romance includes the fact that the couple is in constant touch with very little or no "alone time" which more often than not creates tension leading to friction. In extreme cases, this may result in

reputation-damaging open "war". An office romance may also undermine the abilities of the individuals involved to perform their professional duties. Things like reward and punishment as well as the use of power and politics within the office setting may be affected by a love affair.

An office fling between an executive and a subordinate may also presage a damaging sexual harassment claim. Many researchers agree that the best form of office dating involves unattached individuals in different departments. And even then, there should be no rush. The potential lover should be studied well enough to see whether they are matured enough to handle the pressures and emotional burden a relationship is likely to bring.

Dating a peer at the office is somewhat acceptable but dating your superior or someone who reports to you does not often go down well and is fraught with banana skins, not only does this raise the potential for a sexual harassment claim, at the very least it may decrease morale in the department and raise suspicions by co-workers of preferential treatment."

For that reason, many companies now forbid romance between bosses and subordinates. Other companies, for example, require persons involved to sign consensual relationship agreements – also known as "love contracts" which state that the relationship is voluntary. It is not all doom and gloom for finding love at the office. As people spend more time at work, office romance is more common in the workplace than say a generation ago.



## THE LEGAL POSITION

People in supervisory positions who have office affairs with subordinates run the risk of becoming the subject of a sexual-harassment suit if they later claim to have been coerced or pressured into the relationship for fear of their job.

For that reason, many companies now forbid romance between bosses and subordinates to avoid any wounding repercussions an office romance can bring, it is best to have a company policy regarding office dating. Employers need to handle the issue with care without too much bureaucracy. Even if there is no company policy, you still need to figure out what is acceptable behavior and what is not. Employers cannot stop romantic relations between employees; however, they can develop guidelines for their organization to manage such situations to minimize potential claims of harassment or bullying. Accordingly, in light of the issues, the question remains is office romance worth it?

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