

Debate

The Increase in Workplace Relationships

ISSUE: Should employees be allowed to pursue relationships at work?

In today's society individuals spend much of their waking hours in a work setting. As a result, workplace relationships are becoming increasingly common. Companies are adopting strict policies prohibiting dating among coworkers, particularly regarding relationships between a superior and a subordinate. Unfortunately, sometimes employees disregard these policies and continue to pursue relationships while concealing them. By doing this, employees create liabilities for employers due to the consequences that can result from a relationship ending badly. Romance in the workplace has proven to be extremely controversial and is a topic that requires significant attention from employers to ensure cohesive work performance from all employees.

When beginning to pursue workplace relationships, employees often do not consider the fact that they are not only affecting themselves but also affecting others around them. When former CEO Brian Dunn of Best Buy was having a relationship with an employee, the firm's audit committee found that the relationship had resulted in a negative work environment. Some workplace relationships can create conflicts of interest, especially if the couple works in separate departments. Working in an environment where there is hierarchical or status roles can ultimately result in the development of problems if either party involved holds a higher position than the other. Also, these relationships can prove potentially unethical if private information is disclosed in the relationship.

Another consequence that can stem from interoffice dating is the potential claim for harassment. If the relationship ends on negative terms, one party may try to claim sexual harassment. This becomes even more serious when relationships exist between superiors and subordinates. For this reason, many companies have strict policies that require those in a position of authority to report any such relationships and discipline those found to be in violation. For instance, outsourcing firm iGate Corp. fired its CEO for allegedly not reporting a relationship with an employee until more than a year later.

On the other hand, workplace relationships are sometimes viewed as the only way employees are able to find time to interact with others who share similar interests. Due to the demands of working a full time job, some individuals may have no other choice. In some cases workplace relationships have been viewed as a motivational tool that increases job performance. This usually occurs when employees attempt to disprove any negativity associated with an office relationship. Also, it has been said that interoffice dating can foster further communication within the workplace and create connections between separate departments, which can provide beneficial accessibility for some individuals. While some relationships end badly and negatively affect the work environment, the workplace is one of the most common places to meet one's future spouse or significant others. According to one survey, the workplace has been listed as the most common place to meet one's future spouse among individuals between the ages of 28 and 39.

It is important for employers to address the issue of workplace relationships in order to be proactive with the situation. Ways employers can avoid problems that occur in this area is to establish policies that are clear and concise concerning to parameters of workplace relationships. The most important way for organizations to avoid problems is to develop and convey their specific polices to employees.

Opinions vary on whether it is ethical or unethical to pursue these types of relationships in the workplace. With growing demands and increased time commitment, employees may have trouble seeking relationships outside of their office. Employees tend to pursue opportunities that serve them best, and companies must address this issue to avoid future challenges in this area.

There are two sides to every issue:

1. Allowing employees to pursue relationships at work is unacceptable and should be limited with policies and procedures.
 2. Allowing employees to pursue relationships at work is acceptable as long as the company clearly specifies appropriate conduct.
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