

Office Romance: Worth the Risk?

by Karen Card, Relationship Coach

She regularly sees her handsome coworker at the coffee pot. In fact, she has started drinking more coffee just to increase her chances of an encounter. He occasionally sees her in meetings and tries not to stare. They both know there is a spark between them, but they have been trying to act professionally and ignore it. They are definitely interested in a romantic relationship, but they both value their careers. Should they take the chance for romance?

People always set out to act professionally at the office – however romance is not about being professional, it is very personal. Romantic decisions are not made with your head; they are made with your heart. And because your heart is involved, you may not make the best decisions in regards to your career. Before you start an office romance, ask yourself if it is really worth it. Is this person you are attracted to worth damaging your reputation or possibly losing your job? Here are 6 reasons why office romances are risky:

1. Everyone Will Find Out: How will your coworkers feel when they find out you are dating a colleague or even the boss? Even when you try to keep an office romance quiet, it doesn't stay quiet. People like to talk to their coworkers and friends about their love lives, so if she lets it slip that she is dating someone in the office, or if he casually mentions he is interested in a woman on his team, the rumors will be brewing. Once a romance begins, you can't act on impulse because public displays of affection at work make everyone very uncomfortable. Getting caught kissing in the office is a quick way to lose the respect of your coworkers. Or worse yet, lose respect of management.

Dating someone who works outside your office prevents hiding your feelings. When you love someone, you want to show it. Keeping a relationship hidden is not emotionally healthy for either partner. Turning your love and affection off during the day and back on after 5:00 pm is very hard to do.

2. Competition: Do you want to compete with your new love for the big promotion? It is natural for men and necessary for women to compete at work, but do you want to compete in your romance? How will you feel if your new love gets promoted and you don't? Will you feel like celebrating after work? It is very hard to turn off the competitive drive at the end of the work day. Healthy relationships are based on love and respect, not competition. He should treat her with care and respect and she should respond to him with appreciation and receptivity – not competition.

3. Arguments Happen: Relationships are hard and sometimes there will be arguments. If you work with your partner, it will cause increased tension at work – especially if one partner's position is superior to the other, or if you are working on the same team. If you are dating your boss and you have a personal argument, will you be able to treat them with respect at the office (even if you think they are being a jerk at home)? Not seeing each other during the day helps distract couples from their personal arguments and relieves some tension so they can communicate better when they get together at the end of the day.

4. Damage to your reputation: A potential office romance will always fuel the rumor mill. Remember, in an office setting, perception is reality. Even if you aren't sleeping together, subtle flirting at work will be enough to start the rumors. There also could be the claims of favoritism. If you get a promotion, your colleagues may think it is because you are sleeping with the boss, and you will lose their respect. In a healthy romantic relationship, you should be able to share all your personal and professional successes with your coworkers and your new love interest. Your personal life should enhance your happiness, not negatively affect your career.

5. Lose a promotion: What happens if the relationship ends? Does it cost you a promotion? Nobody starts a romance with plans to have an ugly break up – but it happens. If you end up with a bad break up, will you be able to avoid a major confrontation at work? If you break up with your boss, will you still be considered for a promotion? Even if you don't intend to hurt the other person, breaking up is hard – especially at the office. Ideally, when you have a break up, the only effect on your career is that you will have more free time to work overtime – which may ultimately earn you a promotion.

6. Lose Your Job: After an ugly break up, if the situation gets too uncomfortable, are you willing to leave your job? Or if confrontations happen on a regular basis, you may be asked to leave your job. Is your office romance worth looking for another job? When dating someone outside the office you won't have to leave your job unless your new love makes enough money to support you both. That's the best reason to leave a job.

Many times people are spending so much time at work that they don't have time to look for romance outside of the office. But just because it happens frequently doesn't mean it is the best choice for you personally or professionally. So before you start an office romance, ask yourself if the person you are interested in is really worth leaving your job. If not, keep your work relationships friendly and platonic – which will prevent rumors and accusations by coworkers. To help keep your job and promote your career, it is best to think of everyone at the office as your first cousins – you might feel an attraction, but there is no chance of romance. So for the sake of your career, take some time and look outside your office for romance.

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