

Rules for that office romance

The Garden of Eden was probably the symbolic scene of humankind's first office romance. If Adam and Eve hadn't decided to pursue their mutual attraction, the world might now be full of four-legged creatures rather than two-legged humans.

Workplace attraction has always happened, simply because the office is a place of social interaction. And where you have social interaction, the ground is fertile for romantic possibilities.

Were it not, Hollywood would be all the poorer for subject matter. What would Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy have done if it were not for office romances?

One of the reasons we go to work is for social contact, because humans are social creatures. So it's quite normal to expect that sexual relationships will start at the office.

If the idea of an office romance sounds tantalising, let's look at the rules for making it work.

First, the obvious – test the water and find out if mutual attraction is possible and if the person is actually available, or if it's just a one-way route up a dead-end street.

If it's an office where there's lots of social contact in day-to-day activities, it will be normal for people to have friendships and sometimes socialise outside work.

In this case, there are lots of opportunities for you to subtly investigate the romantic possibilities. If there is not a lot of socialisation outside work hours, you're going to have to be creative and perceptive, and try to gauge from a quick chat in the corridor if your overtures might be favourably received.

Let's presume you have tested the water and found it inviting. Once you have embarked on an office romance, you have to be careful it doesn't focus on work talk and issues to the detriment of the other interests in your lives.

Use the office as a jumping-off point to developing a multi-layered relationship where you have lots of things in common other than work.

Now the tricky bit – if the boss gets involved with an employee, you have to negotiate your roles very carefully. Make sure you keep to your work roles at the office, and save your different personal roles for the time you share away from work.

Many people manage this very successfully - being aware of the boundaries is what it's all about.

It's also important to decide at what point the new couple feel comfortable about "going public". When you do this, give the people around you time to adjust.

Colleagues have been used to dealing with you as two separate individuals, and now they have to learn to deal with a couple as well. Working out what is permissible to talk about in the office and what is off limits is important for everyone's comfort.

If you have fallen in love across the photocopier, it's vital to be sure your interest is returned. If you're not receiving those warm fuzzy feelings back from your proposed love interest, drop it!

Continuing to chase your object of unrequited love could land you on sexual harassment charges. No means no, anywhere, any time.

The chances of an office romance becoming a permanent relationship are as good as they would be at any other place of common interest, such as a sporting club.

If the relationship does not last, the break-up is much more manageable if you have practised sticking to your work roles and leaving the personal stuff for outside the office.

When you embark on an office romance, the future is exciting because you don't know what is ahead of you, and half the fun is in the journey.

Although it might end in tears, or life-long romance, life would be pretty dull if we never took risks.

Survival tips

- **Try to find a subtle way to check out if the attraction is mutual**
- **Remember that no means no – if it's not mutual, don't pursue it**
- **Have clear boundaries between your office life and your private relationship.**