

DEBATE

Do employers have a right to interfere in office romances?

YES

Angela Baron, employee engagement adviser, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

It's almost impossible to legislate against office romances. Some have tried, most notably in the US where so called "love contracts" required absolute honesty about any relationship with a co-worker. In the UK, their worth has been questioned, because too intrusive a company policy often only serves to drive a romance underground.

And what business is it of the employer to know who's seeing who? Well, maybe none, yet if elements of the relationship spill over into the workplace, for example a manager favouring a subordinate who happens to be their new partner, or a lover's tiff that turns into a slanging match over the photocopier, it may have an impact on performance.

Similarly, the persistence of the love-struck can easily become harassment if the feelings are not reciprocated, and colleagues may feel less than comfortable when confronted with too open a display of affection. And what happens when it all goes wrong? Will feuding ex-lovers still be able to work on the same team?

So while draconian policies are not the answer, a sensible approach to ensuring appropriate behaviour at all times is. Employees should be made aware that although private lives are private, they should not impact negatively on work roles. If they do, then inappropriate behaviour or poor performance will be dealt with by formal procedures.

Any policy should make it clear the behaviour that is expected in the workplace and that which will not be tolerated. So while you can't stand in the way of love, you can make sure it does not hinder your business.



Love blooms bright: but if an office romance starts to affect workplace behaviour, should an employer intervene?

NO

Susie Ambrose, chief executive, Seventy Thirty

There are more than 13 million single people in Britain and a huge amount of them are unhappy through being alone and working long hours. Many individuals who work hard and are successful doubt they are able to meet suitable partners as the pace of life can often leave little time for investing in new friendships, activities or hobbies.

In big cities such as London, where there is a fusion of nationalities, religions, cultures and tastes, meeting a partner is often more difficult than in smaller, close-knit communities where core common values are shared.

My aim as an employer is to provide a

professional and pleasant atmosphere where employees can achieve the company's goals. But the workplace must be comfortable and employees should be able to enjoy themselves while being as productive as possible.

I don't intend to stop my employees finding love in order to achieve my aims. I consider them to be intelligent and reasonable people, who would behave appropriately at work and who would know how to protect the company should their romance turn sour.

I promote romance by running a matchmaking and introduction organisation, and I would find it bizarre to forbid love in my offices. So I support those employers that don't interfere in workplace romances.

After all, those of us who feel emotionally fulfilled are well-rounded, happier and generally more productive.

Should office romances be banned? Let us know your view at www.director.co.uk