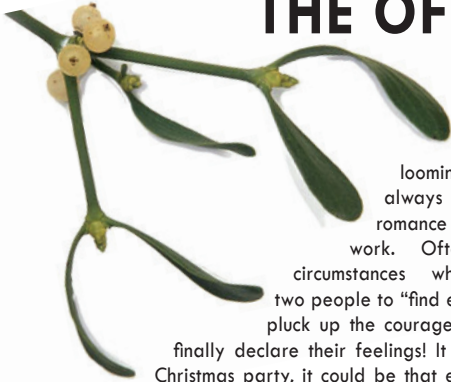


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*Making the workplace a better place to be
with Donna Obstfeld (Chartered FCIPD)*



MISTLETOE AND MANAGING THE OFFICE ROMANCE



With office Christmas parties looming, there is always a chance of romance budding at work. Often, it's these circumstances which encourage two people to "find each other" or to pluck up the courage to flirt or even finally declare their feelings! It may not be the Christmas party, it could be that eyes meet across the photocopier, over the table at lunch or in the boardroom, wherever it is they meet office romances need to be handled with extreme sensitivity and caution. We won't dwell on the extra marital relationships or the boss and the PA stereotype, but on the normal, run of the mill girl meets boy love story.

Many larger companies have policies on workplace relationships, examples may include they can't work in the same team, one can't report to the other or they can't report to the same senior manager (their boss's boss). Although these rules may appear draconian, they are in place to protect both the individuals and the business. Spending too much time together, however much you love someone is just not healthy for a long term relationship; it doesn't give you anything to talk about, except work related topics at the end of the day! Also other members of the team may feel excluded or uncomfortable around the love birds and if there is an argument between the couple in love then productivity and moral can be significantly impacted. In many businesses there are clear policies and procedures and one of the lovebirds may well be moved to another

suitable job in a different team or area.

This is all very well in medium or large companies, but how do small businesses manage? It is not usually possible to move people around, to separate the couple on a day to day basis or to prevent their relationship spilling over into the workplace. Small business owners need to tread carefully so as not to discriminate against employees in a workplace relationship, but they do need to protect their business and put it first. Ideally the business would have a policy on workplace relationships and the couple would be required to declare their relationship in the first instance. Once they're "out in the open" they would need to work with the business owner to ensure that any impact on day to day operations is minimized.

Many small businesses are family run and the same rules and precautions should be adopted for new romances as for existing family members. These might include things like who can sign off expenses, manage performance, award pay increases or earn higher commissions. The business owner needs to reiterate from day one that they are to leave their personal life at home (just as all employees should) and remain focussed on their objectives.

One risk to the business which could cause significant problems is if the relationship fails. Can the employees continue to work together without impacting on the business or other colleagues? If there are problems with performance or attitude as a result of a relationship breaking down, whether it started in the office or not, then those involved need to be performance managed or disciplined in line with normal company policy and procedures.

For more information on managing office romance and putting policy in place contact DOHR on 01923 504100 or email us at enquiries@dohr.co.uk

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