



## Blog: Valentine's Day and workplace romance

Posted by SJ Beale in [Strategies](#), [Managing people](#), [Business lifestyle](#) on Thu, 14/02/2013 - 08:28



Once again Valentine's Day is upon us, a day for sweethearts to declare their love for one another and to mark the occasion with a card, flowers and perhaps a meal.

A situation that should be applauded you may say, however, it depends on the circumstances of the relationship. When a relationship has been formed in the workplace, there are key things that employers need to be aware of.

When things are going well there can be increased productivity and everything is sweetness and light. However workplace relationships can lead to competition, distraction and office gossip.

According to research four in ten employers have experienced problems with workplace relationships. Issues that can arise include complaints of favoritism, decreased morale, bullying if a relationship has ended, sexual discrimination, sexual harassment and constructive dismissal all of which could have a negative impact in the workplace.

It is difficult to have an outright ban on relationships, which would be difficult to manage but there should be clear guidelines with regard to conduct.

Consideration should be given to and guidance provided on relationships between supervisors and those they manage, employees and clients and possibly between team members. The circumstances under which relationships should be disclosed should be included.

The policy should apply to all members of staff regardless of seniority, marital status or sexual orientation. Disciplinary sanctions may need to be incorporated into a workplace relationship policy that could include a verbal warning, a transfer or even possibly dismissal depending on the potential for misconduct.

Furthermore a robust harassment procedure should be in place.

When drawing up procedures, it might be a good idea to consult with employees to ensure that they are acceptable. After implementation the procedures should then be well communicated and training for managers provided.

In the US there is a "love contract" which is an agreement between the employer and the employees which states that their relationship is consensual and free from coercion, intimidation and harassment and that employees agree not to enter into any conduct that could be harassing, unprofessional or inappropriate. This concept has come to the UK, but it would not prevent an employee from bringing a claim of sex discrimination due to the Equality Act 2010. However a love contract could demonstrate an employer has taken all reasonable steps to prevent discrimination or harassment.

Workplace romance should not be discouraged, but employers should take action to minimise their risks.