

# CARELESS WHISPERS

It's February – the month of romance.  
By Bryony Taylor

**T**he January blues are over, the nights are getting lighter and February, the season of St Valentine's and romance has arrived. Replacing the garish flashing lights and Last Christmas are the equally obnoxious pink heart shaped balloons and insipid strains of Careless Whispers. If you're single 'tis the season to ignore, which one might choose to do, by staying in the office a little bit longer – just until after the shops close.

New, aptly timed research released by the University of Westminster at the British Psychology Society Conference, suggests that companies who encourage employees to stay longer in the office, are simultaneously encouraging the sticky taboo of office romance. The research conducted by occupational psychologist Chantal Gautier found that employees who decided to indulge in an affair with a colleague did not let their productivity suffer during the relationship, but that their performance had decreased following the break up of the romance.

Gautier's research suggests several factors can play a key role in the development of the office romance, especially a culture of long working hours and the increasing number of women in the professional workplace.

Often organisations also recruit similar personalities for a team atmosphere, placing like-minded people in frequent close contact.

Office relationships are given such a stigma that those involved regularly choose to keep to a high level of secrecy, often pretending to arrive and go separately from the office. However such measures are rapidly being seen as unnecessary as fellow employees are often indifferent to the situation. A survey conducted for Lloyds TSB implied that more than 70% of workers have had a relationship with someone they've worked with. On top of this a staggering third of employees say they met their future life partner at work.

America's Southwest Airlines, one of the biggest grossing companies in the world, says that over 1,600 of its 27,000 employees are married to each other. Proud of its flying cupid role the company chose to use LUV as its stock market symbol. However, many employers discourage office romances, either implicitly or in a written code of conduct, for fear of favouritism. Therefore *USP* is here to help those who may be too depressed to recognise the signs; February is only a short month after all. ■





**SPOT THE SIGNS:**

**Lunch breaks**

Who do you spend it with and where?

**Gifts**

Presents, especially flowers are always a good sign.

**Emails**

Do you spend all day emailing the person who sits two desks away?

**After work drinks**

Is it always the same people ending the boozy evening together?

**Tongue in your ear**

Which ear?