

INTERNAL AFFAIRS

When working relationships get personal.

BY KNEEZ BUKHARI

There's nothing wrong with a little mild flirtation at work. With the right people, and in the right way, it can add an element of excitement to an otherwise routine day. It will give you a reason to primp in the bathroom before dropping off your latest report. It could encourage you to work longer hours in a bid to spend more time around the office hottie. It could even incite you to start dotting your 'i's with little red hearts. Bless. And, if no one else is aware of the situation, think of all the potential double-entendres you could employ in daily conversation! "When do you think you'll be getting off today?", "Put it in my box when it's ready", "I want it on my desk NOW!"

The way most of us work these days, the office is one of the only places we can meet a potential partner. However, be warned, there's a reason why companies frown on

inter-office relationships and, in some cases, impose prevention policies. Frankly, a heck of a lot more could go wrong during an office affair than could potentially go right. As much as your manager may find the thought of a budding romance being formed at the water cooler engaging, the prospect of 'the end of the affair' will no doubt overshadow it. As will tension in the office, jealousy between co-workers, interrupting a secret rendezvous behind, under, on his desk or even, heaven forbid, being slapped with a harassment lawsuit. All of which are potential outcomes of what may have started out as a little innocent word play.

From your point of view, a break up is rarely pleasant and may break your heart, but when it happens at work it could end up costing you your job, or even your career as well. Especially if the person

you're dating happens to be your boss. Thankfully, most bosses have caught on to the fact that it's easier to replace a girlfriend than a valuable employee, and vice-versa for employees. But co-worker relationships also need careful consideration. For no-risk-nookie, follow these simple rules:

- *Let those in-the-know, know. Once the relationship has become established, chances are, it will be discovered sooner rather than later, especially in small offices. As a matter of professional courtesy, let your superiors know so they are aware of the situation and not out of the loop.*
- *Don't let it affect your job. Unless it's making you a happier, more productive person at work, leave it outside the office. Don't disappear together halfway through the day, wander in late together after lunch, or have slanging matches with your other-half across the office.*
- *Be upfront about what you expect from a relationship. If you're just after a fling, and they're booking the church, the repercussions could reverberate around your office and further. Think 'Fatal Attraction' and rabbit stew.*
- *Keep it low-key. There's no point announcing the fact every time you go to lunch with one of the cute guys from sales, or one of the hot girls from marketing. That's how rumours are started, so wait until you know for sure.*

And if you can manage all that, then good luck, may you be one of the happy percentage who finds true love by the light of the photocopier. ■



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