

I Want to Hold Your Hand: Love at Work



To be read in the key of G and with apologies to the Beatles whose hit, I Want to Hold Your Hand, was number one on the Billboard Hot 100 chart on this date in 1964 and the Beatles' overall best-selling worldwide single.

There's nothing new about falling in love and being in a romantic relationship, but if there's anything we've learned from human resource managers over the years, it is that employees can sometimes be very irrational when "love" arrives at the workplace. Which reminds us of the title of another song by another famous British rock band: "Blinded by love" released by the Rolling Stones in 1994.

According to one 2013 survey, nearly 40 percent of employees have dated a co-worker in the US. Which industries reportedly have the most office romance?

1. Leisure & Hospitality
2. Information Technology
3. Financial
4. Health Care
5. Professional & Business Services

Office romances are tempting and sometimes they have a good ending. But office romances, as our clients inform us from time to time, don't all end with warm fuzzy feelings. Valentine's Day is a perfect time of year to remind employers to review key policies to ensure that a workplace romance does not get in the way with business objectives both when it thrives and when one of the parties isn't consenting to it. Here are some policies and guidance when it comes to Love@Work.

Harassment or Respectful Workplace Policies

Case-law informs us that relationships can be complicated when the relationship crosses the line from workplace romance to workplace harassment. What is your best response to a harassment complaint? Make sure your policy:

- Is clear, communicated and enforced
- provides a definition of "harassment" and a broad definition of "workplace"
- has a clear informal and formal complaint process
- has a fair and confidential investigation process; and has

- a fair and final outcome mechanism

Code of Conduct Policy

Your Code of Conduct should clearly:

- say romantic relationships must not affect the work environment or productivity
- require disclosure of workplace romances to human resources when the romance is between a superior /subordinate
- reference your harassment policy

Social Media and the Internet Policy

Social media is everywhere – now is as good a time as any to review your social media and internet policies to ensure that something like “I want to hold your hand”, or “and when I touch you I feel happy inside” does not land you before a human rights tribunal or a courtroom. What should you do here?

- make sure your social media or internet policies dovetail with other applicable policies (e.g., harassment, code of conduct, confidentiality, etc.)
- emphasize that **all** company policies apply when employees use social media or the internet to talk about co-workers or things going on at the workplace (e.g., harassment, code of conduct, confidentiality, etc.)
- remind employees that what they say on social media can result in discipline

What does this mean?

As Frank Sinatra sang:

Love is a many splendored thing
It's the April rose that only grows in the early spring
Love is nature's way of giving a reason to be living
The golden crown that makes a man (or woman) a king

But we know that sometimes love can harm the workplace in terms of lost productivity, complaints of harassment and the fallout when a relationship ends. It's time to go over your workplace policies and make sure everyone knows the rules about Love@Work.



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