

# What are the Most Important Factors Why Workplace Romance Must be Controlled and Managed?



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1. Potential risks; retaliation; disruption
2. Retaliation; inappropriate behavior; risks.
3. Disruption; productivity; retaliation
4. Productivity; employee morale; discriminator.

## **ANSWER**

Productivity; employee morale; discriminator.

## **WHY IS IT RIGHT**

Romantic relationships between co-workers are common. Employee relationships can lead to disruption, loss of productivity, decreased employee morale, claims of discrimination and harassment.

So, employers must recognize the reality of romance at work while managing potential risks. Here are five tips for proactive employers looking to mitigate potential liability.

### **Implement Effective Anti-Sexual Harassment Policies**

Employers should implement well-developed sexual harassment policies in order to curtail inappropriate behavior and prevent liability arising from potential sexual harassment claims.

A policy must clearly prohibit harassment, define what constitutes harassment in terms easily understood by employees and require employees to report harassment. A well-drafted policy also provides methods and procedures for reporting harassment. It also should contain a statement prohibiting retaliation against any person who reports or participates in an investigation of sexual harassment.

### **Set Specific Rules Governing Workplace Romance**

Employers may also choose to implement policies outlining permissible and prohibited conduct concerning dating among co-workers. Companies often prohibit relationships between employees in supervisory/subordinate roles given the inherent issues that can arise.

Policies should reference the company's anti-harassment policy and remind employees how to report unwanted conduct.

### **Take Complaints Seriously**

If employees come forward with complaints, employers should avoid the temptation to write off a complaint stemming from a failed romance as a mere lovers' quarrel.

### **Consider Love Contracts**

Some companies may have employees engaged in consensual relationships sign "love contracts."

the contracts typically contain:

- A restatement of the company's anti-harassment policy
- An acknowledgement of the employees' commitment to comply with the anti-harassment policy
- Affirmation that the relationship is voluntary, consensual and welcome
- An agreement to not engage in public displays of affection
- Agreement that there will be no negative impact on work due to the relationship
- A commitment to maintain professionalism even after the relationship ends
- A commitment to inform the company of "unwelcomeness" of advances.

When a workplace romance fails, one employee (often the subordinate employee in the case of a subordinate/supervisor relationship) may claim to have been pressured into the relationship.

signed love contract may help maintain a functional office environment in the event that a relationship ends badly though it does not guarantee protection from liability.

### **Train Your Workforce**

Managers should be trained on how to deal with problematic situations that can arise when employee relationships sour or when a claim of harassment is made.

With respect to employees in non-supervisory roles, companies may want to train these employees to ensure that they know the correct channels to complain about harassment or other issues arising from office romance.

### **WHY IS EVERYTHING ELSE WRONG**

A recent survey found that more than 1 out of 3 employees report dating a co-worker at same point. But unfortunately, such employee relationships are unsuccessful. Employers who fail to implement the aforementioned five tips can result in disruption and loss of productivity, decreased employee morale, claims of discrimination and harassment including costly sexual harassment lawsuits.