

Is **attraction** worth your future career?

When is the office romance not ok?
A guide and checklist to consider in the workplace.

We know it happens.

The news is once again full of stories of alleged misconduct, and inappropriate behaviour. The world is also full of stories of couples who have met at work. So how do you navigate this tricky question?

On one side, I hear you ask, what is the problem? These are consenting adults and don't lots of people meet their partners at work? You can't stop people from falling for each other, it happens. Yes, it happens, work is just another social setting where people meet and form friendships – relationships are part of that reality.

But when is it not ok? Is there a line between appropriate and inappropriate relationships? This is not a completely black and white topic, and indeed it has generated much discussion by everyone at mwah.



So, here is our list of when it's not ok:

1. When there is a **significant power imbalance**. When one person in the relationship is in a position of power over the other at work. This more often than not, turns out badly. When we look at power, this may include factors such as age, seniority in the organisation or the ability to influence decisions or outcomes.
2. When **one person reports to the other**. This is a specific example of a power imbalance, with the added issue of a conflict of interest. How can you be objective in every day working decisions, performance discussions and salary decisions in this situation? Even if you think you are being fair, consider the perception of others.
3. Where there is any form of **conflict of interest**. If you are going to be making decisions on promotions, recruitment, development, or in any way contributing to the future role of an individual, then it is not appropriate to be in a relationship at the same time (even if they don't report directly to you).
4. When there's a **regular turnover of junior staff** that are ex relationship partners with one of the senior people in an office, this is clearly a problem. People's careers and people's lives are being negatively impacted. This indicates a **pattern of behaviour** which is not appropriate.
5. Where there is considerable **impact on the broader team** – particularly if it is a supervisor/leader and a member of a particular team.

If you are a senior person in any organisation, your role comes with the responsibility to represent your organisation and to lead by example. Every day your behaviours and conduct are highly visible. You are absolutely accountable for your behaviours in the workplace. Yes, this includes what you do outside of the workplace, which always has the potential to become public. If you would not be comfortable to have your behaviour highlighted on the front page of the paper, then it is probably not appropriate.

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So, what do you need to consider if you find yourself falling for someone in the workplace:

- Is the person you are falling for more senior to you? Is this relationship balanced?
- Is this relationship a pattern of behaviour for either of you?
- Can you realistically keep the relationship outside of the work environment?
- Can you keep the boundaries between your private life and work life separate? What does that look like for you and your partner and what does that look like for those in the workplace around you?
- Have a realistic and serious think about whether you will need to make a choice between pursuing the relationship or staying in the job you are in, and whether you are happy to bear those consequences (particularly where your partner is your supervisor/manager?)
- Tell your CEO – while it might be exciting to be secretive about it, people notice, and it is far better to be honest up front.