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Title: Mixing work and sex? Proceed with caution
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It's the ultimate mind slap. You spend the majority of your waking hours at work (oy.) You're single (not so bad). And you don't have time to meet anyone else except those riding the same corporate train as you.

What are you supposed to do? If you're mutually attracted to each other and it seems right, why should a shared fax machine stand in the way?

Work can be a seductive place, discounting the long hours and restrictions on the supply closet. After college it's one of the rare opportunities for mandatory bonding. Working side by side with co-workers--sometimes into the night--can be tantalizing. Working together is like dating without the title or sex. But if you jump into an office romance, proceed with caution.

First off: Know your company's policy. Look no further than Boeing's ex-CEO Harry Stonecipher, who recently was ousted for having an affair with a female employee that violated the company's code of conduct, not to mention his own marriage vows.

If it's within company standards, still recognize that corporate relationships are open to corporate scrutiny. No matter the company, there's a water cooler and people talking around it. It makes the relationship more vulnerable to the eyes and interpretations of your co-workers. Relationships should be protected from judgment, not get throttled into the thick of it.

Besides, any couple staring at each other's mugs 24/7 is going to suffer. Relationships need pause and time to rejuvenate. Because of the rise in interoffice romance, several companies have instituted policies to ensure married or dating employees are departmentally separated.

Navigating a romance within corporate life isn't crazy difficult. But it takes mindfulness and discretion. It's just when the deal gets raw and the muck slaps the fan that this type of incestuous affair can blow.

One reader characterized his work romance as "hell." Although he was initially attracted to his lady because of her sweet, soft demeanor, as the facade was stripped down along with the clothing, her true character came out. It was ultimately her controlling side that led him to break it off.

But because they shared a company floor, she was able to make his world full-force drama. His reputation ground down as fast as the rumor mill could churn it. Eventually he became alienated from his core group and finally left the company. Semi-extreme? Perhaps. But, this isn't uncommon.

Now, if the object of your desire is your boss, think again. Getting involved with the one person who can affect your livelihood is plain dangerous. And who wants to take orders at home, especially from the same mouthpiece ruling your ear all day?

One reader confided that the fact that her partner was her superior during the day made her feel more obligated at night. Understood. Power struggles in average relationships are challenging enough; they're even tougher when one partner owns the other eight hours a day.

Bosses aside, there are possibilities to making the office romance work. Separate corporate divisions and keeping the entire relationship as quiet as possible will give you the best chance. Just beware and try your best to protect the relationship and yourself.

Remember, a heart rarely breaks without sound. Especially near that water cooler.

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