

hasslefree 
Human Resources & Health and Safety



hasslefree 

Do you employ staff?

HR Update March 2016

Relationships at Work

Due to the large amount of time adults spend at work, it isn't surprising that many people meet their partners in the workplace. Similarly, it is quite common for an employee to inform family members or friends of a vacancy at their workplace, which can then in turn result in relatives or close friends working together. Sometimes, relationships in the workplace can be difficult for employers to manage. This newsletter therefore provides advice and guidance on managing personal relationships at work.

The Risks

So what are the risks of personal relationships in the workplace? One potential risk is that of nepotism, the act of appointing relatives or friends into a position for which another candidate could have been better qualified. If the relationship is between a superior and a subordinate, other employees could begin to get suspicious that any promotions, pay rises, or "mild" (rather than fair) punishments for misdeeds could be the direct result of the relationship itself. Nepotism can lead to resentment and bitterness in the workplace. Even if an employee has earned their promotion, it is possible their colleagues respect this or believe it to be the case. There are plenty of other risks associated with personal relationships at work; romances can lead to a lower level of productivity, either because those involved in the romance are not focused on their work, or due to "gossip" about the romance distracting other team members. In some cases, people may feel an outsider or possibly alienated by working closely with a 'couple'. In addition many people may feel uncomfortable about possible public displays of affection in the work place.

Personal relationships turning sour may also present a risk. A workplace romance may end badly, negatively impacting the employees directly involved and indirectly impacting upon other team members. No one wants to feel caught up in someone else's drama. Understandably, people are often upset, emotional, and angry due to a relationship break down or an argument, and when an employee can't escape from these emotions at work, their productivity, focus and attendance, may suffer as a result. Another risk may be the loss of a valued and committed employee who decides to seek new employment due to a personal relationship break down at work or due to the frustration of working with family members. A personal relationship which negatively impacts upon the workplace, may also cause an employer to consider the feasibility of continuing with the employment contract. This in turn may lead to a risk of a claim if a fair dismissal process is not followed correctly. Finally, with regard to romantic relationships in the workplace turning sour: another risk may include claims of harassment from one of the former parties to the relationship.

How to Minimise the Risks?

It would be considered best practice to have a clear policy about 'Relationships at Work'. This policy should clearly communicate to employees what the standards and expectations are for conducting personal relationships in the workplace and what is considered appropriate and inappropriate in terms of professional behaviour in the workplace.

A clear policy would also provide a framework in which to manage any potential risks which may arise. For example, it may clearly state that if a personal relationship between a supervisor/manager and a subordinate is formed, then it will be the responsibility of the supervisor/manager to disclose the relationship to their manager. The policy may also state that if this situation arose, and where practical, one of the employees would be moved to another department.

How Can We Help?

If you would like our support with introducing this type of policy, or any other HR related policy/procedure or if you have any queries relating to the subject of this e-newsletter or any other HR related issue then please don't hesitate to contact us at hradvice@hasslefreehr.co.uk.

Please Note:

We have recently moved office to: Hassle Free HR Limited, 1160 Elliott Court, Herald Avenue, Coventry Business Park Coventry, CV5 6UB.

Our new Telephone Number is: 02476 992869