

Bulletin Board: Love is in the air €! at the office

by Amy_Winter

Workers may look to colleagues when searching for a sweetheart this Valentine's Day. Helaine Olen, co-author of "Office Mate: The Employee Handbook for Finding - and Managing - Romance on the Job," refers to meeting at the office as old-fashioned courting. Co-workers get to know each other slowly since they spend a lot of time together. HR personnel may be unwitting matchmakers when they put two people together who have common interests.

"Relationships develop over time," says Olen. "There is time to get over first impressions."

Most workers start as friends before entering a romantic relationship. A bond may develop slowly by taking breaks at the same time or turning to each other for advice, according to Olen.

If you are wondering about a romantic relationship, ask yourself if you are spending more time with a particular co-worker.

Stay professional about the relationship at work. Olen doesn't see office dating as a big deal as long as people behave and don't mention personal details to other co-workers. Avoid making passes while in the office; go outside to eliminate awkwardness among co-workers.

However, although the office could be an ideal place to find a mate, workers seem to look elsewhere for dates. Only 36 percent of workers surveyed by Spherion, a recruiting and staffing firm that polled 1,391 employees, would think about dating a co-worker if they were single, compared to 39 percent in the surveys from 2006 and 2007. And 60 percent of respondents have chosen to avoid office romance.

Female employees are less willing to date a co-worker than men. Twenty-eight percent of women respondents would date in the office compared to 43 percent of male employees. Female workers also tend to keep their office romances a secret (35 percent), while only 25 percent of males don't kiss and tell.

Fear of hurting one's career doesn't seem to be the main reason for discouraging office dating. Thirty percent of respondents say an office relationship will put their jobs at risk, 31 percent and 40 percent think otherwise. Of those who have dated co-workers, the most participants (34 percent) have been in a relationship for several months.

"We believe that an increasing number of employers have begun to acknowledge the potential for and

existence of workplace dating and have put measures in place to properly manage these relationships," says John Heins, senior vice president and chief human resources officer at Spherion.

"This includes training workers, providing guidelines and written policies. As a result, workers view on-the-job dating as less damaging to their job security and career advancement as long as they follow the guidelines."

Seeing each other both at home and the office may cause too much togetherness, but couples can make it work.

If you are looking for a mate this Valentine's Day, Olen offers a few suggestions. Attend conferences and conventions, join co-workers for happy hour after work or increase your network by meeting your friends' co-workers.

For more information, visit www.spherion.com.

BABY BOOMERS WILL BE MISSED

Retirement among baby boomers may have a serious impact on the future work force. According to a survey by Robert Half International, a staffing firm that interviewed 150 senior executives, 47 percent of respondents say baby-boomer retirements will have the greatest influence on the working world during the next decade.

Global business interactions come in second, with 31 percent of workers, followed by outsourcing at 11 percent and remote work arrangements at 5 percent. Other trends come in at 5 percent, and 1 percent of respondents answered unknown.

"The looming retirement of baby boomers has captured the attention of business leaders who are concerned about retaining the expertise of their most tenured employees," says Max Messmer, chairman and CEO. "Fortunately, many baby boomers are considering working past the traditional retirement age to stay active and continue earning."

"Businesses that accommodate valued staff members who are not ready for retirement but seek new work arrangements, such as flexible or part-time schedules, are best able to keep top performers. Consulting arrangements allow experienced individuals to remain challenged professionally while maintaining the flexibility to pursue outside interests."

For more information, visit www.rhi.com.

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