

## Is It A Date?

### The pros and cons of dating at the office

In today's culture of working 24/7 it's safe to say that most of us spend a lot of time at the office. While this can be a bonus for your career, it can put a damper on your social life. Particularly, the meeting people to date part of your social life.

Having little free time coupled with spending long hours with colleagues leads many people to think about looking for love at the office.

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To help sort through the pros and cons of dating someone you work with, I turned to relationship expert April Masini who pens the popular advice column [Ask April](#). She graciously agreed to share some of her thoughts on dating at the office.

#### ***What's the best thing about dating someone you work with?***

The best thing about dating someone you know is that you know them. You've vetted them by simply showing up in the same office they have, from nine to five for as many years as you've worked together. When you meet someone through an online dating site, or as a blind date, or in a coffee shop or at a party, you don't have the benefit of knowing that: a) they're really employed, b) they show up for work everyday (or don't), c) what their relationships with co-workers are like, and d) what their office, car and work wardrobe really looks like! These are four big factors that help you get to know someone beyond what you learn on a date.

For many people, simply seeing the person they're dating, daily, at the office, is a bonus! When time and energy consuming careers keep people from dating each other, seeing each other at the office is a way to be in touch and keep the relationship going, where it might fail otherwise, because work prevents dates.

It's easy to spend way more than 40 hours a week at work, and with that much time invested, it's easy to notice attractive, potential dates in your office, at your meetings and conventions, and in your professional sector. I think that meeting dates at work is a great opportunity — but you have to be careful about the way you proceed. This shouldn't be a red stop sign, or even a flashing red light — not at all. The same type of warning goes for single parents dating, because simply having a child creates different dating scenarios and warnings than dating without kids, so although there are challenges of office dating, it's something I encourage.

#### ***What is the biggest drawback to dating a coworker?***

If you break up, you're going to see them every day at the office, and if they start dating someone else before you've moved on, you may feel a huge grey cloud at work that you wouldn't if you hadn't dated a coworker.

Another drawback is the reality or impression of favoritism. Lawsuits are based on work relationships that make others feel cut out of the best deals, the best promotions and the best meetings. You may find your supporters at work falling away when they feel you have advantages that they don't because of who you're dating.

*When there's an inequity in power at work, this is complicated.* If you're dating the boss or you're the boss and a coworker at a lower level in the company is dating you, there can be perceived or real inequities and this can be a problem in a best case scenario.

#### ***What's the best way to approach a coworker about going out on a date?***

Great question! The best way to ask someone you work with out on a date, is to do it outside of the office. This doesn't mean you have to stalk them at home to find the time to do so — but it does mean that you should use the lunch hour, the time before and after work, and the parking lot where you bump into each other when parking your car in the morning.

Of course, asking someone out in the office is easier because you're both there — but it can create discomfort if you're rejected, or if they're trying to focus on something else.

#### ***What's the best way to decline a date with a coworker?***

The best way to decline a date with a coworker is to do it directly and cleanly. When you back out halfway because you're too cowardly to say no, you leave that person on the hook — and yourself in an uncomfortable position, as well, waiting for his next approach. "I'm really busy this week," is a halfway rejection that is going to leave you both in limbo. Instead, be clean, clear and kind. "That's so flattering! But I'm sorry, I'm not interested," may be too brutal for some people (although it leaves nothing to the imagination). "Thanks, but I'm going to have to decline," is a little kinder, although it may lead to a question of, "Well, is there a reason why? Next week, instead?" And then you're back to square one — needing to give your coworker a clear message.

What you want to do is to try and preserve the working relationship you have with this person, while diminishing the personal one. It's a little bit of a

balancing act, but it’s a great opportunity to practice your tact.

Remember that rejection is a gift because if you feel it and don’t make it clear, you’re doing the other person a disservice by inviting him to waste his time figuring out how to get you to say yes, because you didn’t say no.

**What, if anything, should you be careful about when you’re dating a coworker? For example, how should coworkers who are dating behave at the office?**

*Keep sex and public displays of affection out of the office.* Never make out in the janitor’s closet, the conference room or the water cooler. And if you don’t heed that advice, at least don’t do it during office hours.

*Do feel free to make workday lunch dates and after dinner dates with each other, but try to squash any affection when coworkers are around.* The weekends are all yours, but when you’re wearing your work clothes because it’s a workday, temper your affection.

*Don’t share private information at the office.* Nobody at the office should know private things about a coworker you’re dating. This is just good etiquette as well as good professional relationship dynamics.

*Be especially prudent with the amount of time you date each other before announcing the union to coworkers.* Hedge against ugly break ups by waiting a few months before letting it slip that you’re dating. When coworkers know the two of you are dating, it’s human nature for them to watch you for signs of good, bad and ugly behavior. Why subject yourself to the microscope before you have to? There’s no relationship insurance, but you can protect yourselves by waiting before going public.

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Annette Richmond, MA is Executive Editor of career-intelligence.com. Having changed careers several times, including working as a writer, recruiter and vocational counselor, she has a unique perspective on career management. She contributes career-related articles to various other sites including TalentCulture, ForbesWoman and LinkedIn. She also coaches a few highly-motivated individuals, visit her site for information.

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