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True love on the job

SEVENTY-FIVE PER CENT OF AUSSIES BELIEVE LONG-TERM ROMANCE IS POSSIBLE IN THE WORKPLACE

VALENTINE'S DAY

PATRICK TADROS

If you're still looking for love this Valentine's Day, it might be time to forget the online dating apps and start looking around the office.

From stolen moments at the lobby cafe to loaded looks by the printer, romance is flourishing as 75 per cent of Australians believe true love is possible in the workplace.

And more than half of us have confessed we've had a crush on a colleague and 39 per cent have dated a co-worker, according to global hiring platform Indeed. But more surprisingly, one in six office romances have ended in marriage.

With work-from-home orders scrapped, office workers are once again hot for love, according to Indeed's workplace psychologist Amanda Gordon.

"Opportunities for meeting people were reduced by the pandemic, so there are a lot of people ready for romance ... and (they're) hoping it might be available in the workplace," she says. "What we can tell from the research is that office romances are frequent and often enduring."

Of course, there can also be downsides to meeting someone in the office fishbowl. We asked experts to explore the good and the bad.

TELL, OR NOT TO TELL

That is the question, with a third of couples admitting they've kept their



Engaged couple Chantel Blake and Jackson Croft met at work. Picture: Emily Howlett

workplace relationship under wraps and never told their employer about it.

Another third believe that it created unnecessary gossip and distraction, and 56 per cent of those who have dated a colleague agreed that working together added a layer of complication to the relationship.

"You have to remain professional at work and be able to switch off when it's personal time," Gordon says.

"There's the chance that others may observe and make judgments. In some cases, there could be a power imbalance that needs to be respected. Signals could also be misinterpreted."

Despite the pitfalls, 41 per cent

stated that once they disclosed an office romance, their employer was supportive, and 32 per cent were able to be open about it.

Karen Gately, HR specialist and founder of Corporate Dojo, says those who pursue a workplace romance need to understand it can have significant consequences.

"Whether an innocent crush or passion-fuelled love, the decisions we make about pursuing love at work can impact our lives for the better or worse for many years to come," she says.

MAKING IT WORK

Gordon says there can be benefits to

an office romance, such as "slowly getting to know someone over time, seeing them interacting with others, and experiencing them in a team as well as individually".

"There's an opportunity to meet, have lunch and chat without the pressure of a date," she says.

Before pursuing a relationship at work, make sure that you are across the company's HR policies, psychotherapist and relationship counsellor Melissa Ferrari says.

"It's perfectly healthy for people who work together to date. It's important you do so with eyes wide open and be aware of the impact

Rules of play

IF YOU are in a romantic relationship at work or thinking about it, there are a few things to keep in mind:

- **Be discreet:** No one wants to have to put up with a couple flirting or bickering at work. No matter how cute or amazing you think your partner is, remember your colleagues probably don't want to hear about it every time they walk past your desk.
- **Understand workplace laws:** Sexual harassment is an unwanted behaviour which makes a person feel offended, humiliated or intimidated. Read the signals your romantic interest sends about their interest in you and a relationship.
- **Is the relationship important?** If you're just looking for a good time, make sure the person you get involved with understands that. Leaving a trail of broken hearts and trust in your wake is unlikely to do anything good for your career.

Source: Karen Gately, HR specialist and founder of Corporate Dojo

that it may have on your careers," Ferrari says.

"If it is love and heading into the long-term, ensure that the relationship always comes first, which may mean making a sacrifice on your career for it to succeed."

Chantel Blake and Jackson Croft say working together enables them to see more of each other and build a solid relationship.

The couple, now engaged, were initially concerned about dating each other.

"Everyone told us we were crazy and that it wouldn't last. Here we are two years later planning our future," Blake says.

"Jackson was the first person I met at the company when I had to pick up my laptop. We clicked instantly. It was love at first sight."

When to seek an accountant or financial adviser – or both

MONEY

ANTHONY KEANE

Confusion about seeking money advice often starts with being unsure who you should be asking for help.

Friends, family and colleagues are a starting point for many, but for professional help it boils down to two professions – accountants and financial advisers, and they offer distinctly different services.

Accountant Mark Gellert, an associate director at dmca advisory,

says people often get confused about what services they may need and who can provide them.

"You could ask an accountant for advice on what tax deductions are available, as well as the best structure to ensure you are not paying more tax than you have to," he says.

Accountants also help with audits, business forecasts and structures, risk management, and compliance and reporting obligations, Gellert says.

"When seeking superannuation advice, including whether a self-managed superannuation fund is

right for you, there are regulations that need to be followed," he says.

"An accountant may be able to advise of the tax implications of superannuation, but would need to hold an Australian financial services licence before advising where you should invest it."

Gellert's colleague Alison Stanbridge is both an accountant and a financial adviser, and says people can ask planners questions such as:

- What can I do to build my wealth?
- How do I invest my money?
- Which super fund should I use?

- Will I have enough money in retirement?
- Can I protect my family financially if something happens to me?

"Accountants have technical and practical tax and business knowledge," she says.

"Financial advisers often have technical and practical knowledge on wealth planning strategies, life insurance and products."

"Some areas of advice overlap, such as when recommending superannuation contributions. Accountants can provide the tax consequences of a given

contribution and financial advisers can assist with where and how to make the contribution."

MBA Financial Strategists director Darren James is a financial adviser and says both professions have restrictions on what they can discuss, but "work well together".

He likens financial planners to GPs who take an overall view of people's financial health and recommend them to other specialists such as accountants and lawyers.

"We can talk general tax but ultimately we have to say 'you need to confirm with your accountant.'"