

Expert Dating Advice: How to Date a Coworker



By Marisa Gooch

Most of us typically view work as a place to acquire skills, earn an income, and build a social circle. But for some, work can also be a place to find their happily ever after.

Take [Gwen Stefani and Blake Shelton](#), for example. They met while judging for [The Voice](#) in 2014. What began as a simple friendship soon sprouted into something more. Now, Stefani and Shelton have been dating for three years and are still going strong.

Dating A Coworker

Dating a coworker isn't only familiar to the celebrity world. According to a survey conducted by [Vault](#), 51 percent of respondents have had an office romance at least once in their careers. Another recent study conducted by [The Knot](#) found that 12 percent of participants met their spouses at work.

For how common it is to date within your work circle, learning how to handle a romantic relationship with a coworker can be difficult, awkward, and stressful. Should you tell the company that you two are dating? How do you address each other at work? What happens if you break up? These questions should be contemplated and answered before you dive into a serious relationship with a fellow employee. To combat the potential awkwardness, here are four guidelines that will help you handle a professional relationship that turns into a personal one.

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1. Check Your Company's Policy

Unless you work in the state of California, it is *legal* for your company to set [fraternization](#) policies, meaning that the company could prohibit employees from participating in romantic or sexual relations with each other. If your company has a strict fraternization policy and it is broken, one or both participants involved could be terminated. Yikes.

Not all companies have strict fraternization policies, though. Some companies have their employees sign a [love contract](#), and other companies don't care if two employees date as long as the work gets done. Before becoming romantically involved with a coworker, check your company's handbook and your employment

contract to confirm that dating within the company is allowed. If you have the green light, it is best to notify your supervisor or boss once your relationship becomes serious so that he or she is aware.

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2. Set Boundaries

Sometimes “all work and no play” is a good thing in terms of how you and your partner interact while in the office. Remember that when you are at work, you are *working*. That means no kissing in the halls, no batting eyelashes at each other, and no overly romantic talk.

[Lynn Taylor](#), author of [Tame Your Terrible Office Tyrant: How to Manage Childish Boss Behavior and Thrive in Your Job](#), says that even though behaving strictly professionally may feel awkward, it is “better to overcompensate than to constantly test the limits of workplace etiquette while hoping for the best.” Maintaining your professionalism will prevent your colleagues from feeling uncomfortable around you and your partner.

Now, I know what you may be thinking: *I can't show ANY form of love or appreciation for my partner in the office?* The answer is you can, but keep it simple and subtle. Going to lunch together or meeting up for breaks is totally fine. Friendly chatting in the coffee room is, too. Discuss with your partner other activities that you both feel uncomfortable participating in while you are at work and stick to your decisions.

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3. Don't Involve the Entire Company

You're dating your coworker, not the company you work for. Keep your relationship private, especially when you have disagreements and fallouts. [Art Markman](#), professor of psychology at the University of Texas, advises this exactly. He says that you should leave any personal quarrel with your significant other out of the workplace.

This means that if you and your partner are fighting, don't tell Sally in the printing room what happened. Likewise, your partner shouldn't tell John two cubicles down about the rude things you said. Sharing the details of your private life with your colleagues can spread rumors and encourage gossiping in the office. You and your partner may forgive and forget, but Sally will see your partner as an awful person, and John will dub you as someone who doesn't have a filter. Even worse, the news could get back to your boss, causing him or her to feel that your relationship is damaging your work ethic. That itself could create a plethora of problems. To keep this from happening, keep your home life at home and your work life at work.

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4. Be Prepared for What Could Come

It is important to be realistic about the future of your relationship. Either it is going to work, or it isn't. If you and your partner decide to get married, will you both stay at your company? If you and your partner break up, how will you interact at work?

Be prepared for both outcomes early on, especially for the outcome that entails tears, heartache, and anger. According to dating expert [Chiara Atik](#), it can be very uncomfortable to work with someone after a breakup. Preparing for the unknown with your partner can help you both have a clear game plan when x, y, or z happens.

If you are making eyes at the girl down the hall or the boy in the mailroom, keep these four guidelines in mind for when that relationship takes off. If you end up belonging to the 12 percent that marries a coworker, all the best to you. If you belong to the majority that knows what it's like when a romantic relationship with a colleague turns sour, don't be afraid to apply these same steps to combat the inevitable awkwardness that may follow.