

Toby • Scenario Text • Office Romance: Off Limits?

<https://techrhet.com/3213/notes/online/toby-scenarios/>

What is the hottest singles scene in Scranton today? Outside of apps and services, the best place to find a date might be the office. Employees are working longer hours and have less time for outside contacts. For that reason, relationships often develop at work—estimates suggest one-third to one-half of all romantic and/or sexual relationships start at work.

David Wallace (recently promoted from Dunder Mifflin CFO to CEO) is concerned about office relationships because of some recent reports of hookups and dating relationships happening in the Scranton branch.

While David has only heard rumors, everyone at the Scranton branch knows Michael and Jan hooked up. Jan is VP of Northeast Sales and Michael is a Regional Manager—so she is his supervisor—which makes the whole thing ethically questionable (and just plain weird... for a bunch of reasons).

Anyway, David is concerned about potential problems resulting from relationships at work. What happens if a relationship between a superior and subordinate results in favoritism? Or even the perception of favoritism?

Maybe worse, what happens if a relationship results in a nasty breakup? Will employees treat each other unfairly? unprofessionally? It's a good thing David doesn't know about Ryan and Kelly yet—that whole thing is a disaster waiting to happen.

David would like to simply ban all relationships among employees. But that's not likely to work. He asks you—Toby Flenderson (Human Resources Representative, Dunder Mifflin Scranton branch)—to learn what guidelines could (and should) be established regarding office romances.

This is going to be tricky. Any message you (Toby) write is going to have to be CCed to Michael (your boss), Jan (your bosses boss), but written to David (your bosses bosses boss). With Michael and Jan's recent hookup, it will be difficult to write in a way that doesn't seem to call them out (but kinda calls them out... since rumors of Michael and Jan are what prompted David's concern).

Your Task: Read the short article [“Romance in the Workplace: Good Thing or Bad?”](#)¹ by Timothy Bland. Submit your findings, reactions, and thoughts about guidelines in a well-organized, easy-to-read short correspondence to David Wallace (CEO), and CCed to Michael Scott (Regional Manager, Scranton) and Jan Levinson (VP, Northeast Sales). You may summarize main points from the article, but use your own words to write the message.

¹ available at <https://www.bizjournals.com/washington/stories/2000/10/23/focus10.html>

PURPOSE

primary purpose:

I am writing to tell my boss what guidelines we could establish regarding office romances.

other purposes:

To help Dunder Mifflin (DM) protect itself from legal liability; to help DM foster a respectful, fair workplace; to avoid making Michael or Jan angry or anxious (foster goodwill, if possible)

info needed:

- summary of points from the article
- reasons for establishing a policy
- suggestions on policy from article

AUDIENCE

identification:

primary: primary audience is David Wallace

secondary: secondary audiences are Jan Levinson and Michael Scott

"real" primary audience members: while I'm addressing the message to David primarily and CCing Michael and Jan, all three of them are really equal members of the primary audience. David is a primary audience because he's responsible for the whole company. Jan and Michael are responsible for parts of the company, but they're primary audience too because they're (recently) involved in an office relationship.

additional: other audiences may include anyone else in the company, including HR and legal counsel/company lawyers; maybe shareholders, and possibly the media (local news stations and papers are always looking for negative/exciting stories about local businesses)

background, demographics, etc:

general/work: All three are long-term professionals who have risen up the ranks in the corporate world. Jan and David have degrees (I don't think Michael does).

David (CEO): relatively new to DM (was hired as CFO before promotion to CEO); Jan (and Michael's) supervisor and CEO of company

Jan (VP of Northeast Sales): not sure how long she's been at DM or where she came from; Michael's supervisor

Michael (Regional/Branch Manager): been at DM for years; started in sales. It might matter that the supervisor/Jan is a woman and her subordinate/Michael is a man; sometimes men's experience with sexual harassment isn't taken as seriously (especially when man is subordinate)

personal: Jan and Michael are (or have been) in a romantic/sexual relationship (or they "hooked up"); not only are they both employees, but Jan is Michael's supervisor.

values & language:

David values the health, stability, and legal protection of DM. He probably values his own ability to be a good leader and his professional status. As former CFO, he's probably aware of the financial risk incurred by office relationships.

Jan values her professional status and the success of the branches under her supervision. She may care about Michael(?), but not romantically (maybe just sexually?); she cares about not getting caught doing something unprofessional.

Michael values his employees at the Scranton DM branch, and he values what his employees think about him (he wants to be seen as "world's best boss," the fun boss, a friend, a "cool" guy, etc. He values Jan more as a girlfriend than a supervisor (Michael really wants a girlfriend).

knowledge (already/need/want):

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expectations:

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context:

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benefits/objections:

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GENRE

possibilities, choice, conventions:

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ORGANIZATION

order of info:

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explanation/reasons:

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STYLE

tone:

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formatting (headings, lists, non-text elements, etc.):

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MEMORANDUM

To:	David Wallace
CC:	Jan Levinson, Michael Scott
From:	Toby Flenderson, HR Representative
Date:	September 30, 2020
Subject:	Romance at Work

Romance is a strong emotion. When things are going good, look out! There isn't much that would step between two people in a hot romance. An earthquake could shake the ground, and as long as they were in each other's arms they wouldn't even notice. But if things turn bad and one of the two feels hurt or rejected, this can cause an earthquake! The emotion can be 100% strong in either direction. Unfortunately, if this personal life is mixed with business life, the outcome is twice as bad.

I have some suggestions that I believe will help with your problem of interoffice dating. It is very important that we protect the employer as well as the employees and make this a comfortable place to work for all parties involved.

We should allow interoffice dating but we do need to set some rules. Reading the article by Timothy Bland, "Romance in the Workplace: Good Thing or Bad?" gave me some ideas. His article had a lot of good information on how to protect an employer. First, we should not allow supervisors to date their subordinates as this will cause favoritism, and will increase the chances of a sexual harassment law suit. In case that this does happen we should immediately remove the employee from the supervision of that manager. Second, public affection should not be displayed in the workplace. What happens in the private life should be left there. Let's encourage communication and make a comfortable environment for everyone. People should not be afraid to let management know if a relationship is present. Lastly, training is the best way to avoid any serious problems. If we provide advance training for all the employees about potential problems with office romance, it might be enough to discourage some people from going down that path in the first place.

If we take all the right steps we should be able to avoid any potential legal liability, and the employees' privacy rights would also be protected.

Have a great day!
Toby Flenderson