The Dos and Don’ts of Office Romance

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Do your employees have love on the brain?

Kaila Lopez and Kyle Hagge, the co-hosts of Morning Brew’s work-life podcast, Per My Last Email, wouldn’t be surprised.

“You’re attracted to a place to work because of the mission, the values, the type of work. And so you are probably going to be around people that are interested in the same things as you, have the same values as you,” Hagge said during a recent episode of HR Brew’s People Person podcast. “So it’s not shocking that people who spend a lot of time together, have similar interests…develop feelings for other people at work.”

They sat down with Kate Noel, SVP and head of people operations at Morning Brew, to discuss the dos and don'ts of office romance, and the role HR stands to play.

The following has been edited for length and clarity.

Office relationships are common, but they're also complicated. When do you think it's a good idea to disclose a relationship to HR?

Lopez: I did marry somebody that I met at work, my first office job, and we actually never disclosed to HR…our office manager disclosed it for us…but it was not a big deal. We were both very young, low on the totem pole, there was no power imbalances or anything. I think where you need to err on the side of caution is when there's a power imbalance at play…because that's when the company's at risk, your career is at risk, and their career is at risk if something goes wrong.

Hagge: If there is a power imbalance, it's probably like ASAP. You need to let people know. That can come back to kind of bite you. If you're peers and you don't work on similar teams and there's not a power dynamic conflict of interest, I would probably tell HR when I have confidence that it's going to be an official thing.

Do you tell your boss first?

Lopez: I think it depends on the relationship you have with the boss and…the reputation of HR…If I'm really close with my boss and in fact I want some advice on how I should report this, then I go to my boss. But I think the reality is they should probably know pretty close to each other.

Hagge: If it is serious enough to tell HR, then yeah, maybe I would actually tell my boss first and just be like, "Hey, give him a heads up, I'm going to go to HR and talk about this, too."

Do you think it's office appropriate or out of pocket to post your work partner on your Instagram grid with a hard caption and everyone knows that you are dating now?

Hagge: That's totally appropriate.

Do you think it's office appropriate or out of pocket to refer to your partner in meetings as "my person" or "babe"?

Lopez: Out of pocket, out of pocket—don't do that…I cannot express enough how you should not be doing that.

What if it's an accident? Like, "Babe, what do you think?"

Lopez: Accident? Fine. Twice? Intentional.

Leaving early together, every Friday, and people are seeing you walk out together?

Hagge: I'm going to say office appropriate. If the work is done, managers are cool with it, and you're not being secretive about it.

What if they're walking out together, hands, fingers, interlocking?

Hagge: I'm cool with it, with handholding…If you're handholding between meetings…then that's a little too much.

Lopez: I'm a hater. Don't do that….You guys can't wait until you're in the elevator to hold hands?

What about taking PTO the same week, without telling your team why, but everyone knows you're dating and it's the same PTO time?

Hagge: That's totally normal…You're making it weirder by not sharing.

What about making inside jokes in front of everyone in meetings?

Lopez: Think it's the same with friends…I think it's appropriate, but…I wouldn't want to do that intentionally to exclude other people.

So in conclusion, it is fine to be in love at work. Just don't hold hands.