



At least she thought to wear a tie.

# Employee Benefits

The modern office fling is sexier, and more complicated, than ever.

One day a few months back my friend Jen\* dragged me into the ladies' room the second I got to work. "You'll never guess who I slept with last night," she said. "Mark!" I think I actually gagged. Mark was another coworker, a weasely know-it-all who wore his khakis way too tight. Apparently, after an extended happy hour, Jen ceased to care that he was widely considered the office douche. She was horny and reasonably confident that he at least wasn't quite as scary as the creep who'd been eyeing her from the end of the bar. So she took Mark home—kicking off what I have to imagine was the luckiest night of his life.

Mark's luck isn't about to run out anytime soon, however—so long as he keeps reporting to work, where he's surrounded by single females. According to a 2007 survey by career research company Vault, Inc., 47 percent of coworkers have dipped their pens in each other's inkwells at some point. Office affairs have been around forever, but they've undergone an evo-

lution. It's no longer the age of *Mad Men*, when upper management was a boys' club, and naive secretaries offered easy romantic foils. Thanks to women's ascendance in the workplace, longer workdays, and later marriages, today's offices are filled with ambitious young singles (and not-so-singles). The workplace has morphed into the modern dating pool, and as a result, several different types of office affairs have emerged—each with its own allures and potential disasters. If you haven't had one yet, chances are you will before you cash in that 401(k).

## The Work Spouse

Work wives and husbands aren't having sex—nor are they actually married—but they might as well be. As far as everyone else in the office is concerned, *something* shady is going on, what with the daily lunches, closed-door "meetings" to share office gossip, and constant e-mails followed by muffled laughter. From nine to five, work spouses are closer to each other than they are with anyone else—even, in certain cases, their actual spouses. "One of my married sisters

has a 'work husband,'" says Melissa, a 39-year-old editor. "She talks about Mike all the time. I've never met the guy, but I know his birthday, his favorite place to vacation...I honestly think my sister would fuck him if there were no consequences. She speaks of him much more excitedly than she does my brother-in-law."

Of course there's considerable benefit to having a work spouse. You have an ally in a stressful environment, someone who understands exactly what bugs you at your job in a way that significant others outside of work can't. "We have a rapport my ex and I never did," says Laila, a 28-year-old medical researcher, of her work husband. "It developed after months of sitting across from each other, griping about the losers we work with. We can communicate with eye contact alone now." But she has no desire to consummate the relationship. "Sex would change things between us," she says. "We work well together because we're so close, and flirting makes work fun. It's perfect as is—I don't want the drama a real affair brings."

## The Overnight Meeting

As easy as it is to fall into bed with a coworker, it's twice as difficult to face them in the morning. Best-case scenario, you both behave like nothing happened—and pass each other in the halls knowing you've gotten away with something. But when one person views the sex as a colossal mistake, it can translate into years of dodging elevators and eating lunch alone.

"Shortly after joining a new ad agency, I went home with a really cute copywriter," says Sophie, 30, also a writer. "We had amazing sex, and the next day I left a Post-it on his computer saying, 'Thanks for a great time.' When we all went out that night, I assumed we'd go home together again. Instead, he showed up with a chick he introduced to me as his girlfriend." Sophie was so angry she spent the next year and a half avoiding him, and their colleagues had to decide which of them to invite out for drinks. "It was horrible. I used to send an intern as a go-between so I wouldn't have to talk to him."

## The Open Secret

According to Vault, 68 percent of workplace romancers said they tried to keep their affairs secret—probably using such time-honored, subtle tactics as leaving for lunch two minutes after one another each day. If you're in one of these relationships, you're not fooling anyone, 007. Rachel, a 32-year-old illustrator, dated another illustrator at her design firm for two years. "In the mornings we'd split up a block away from the office," she says. "And we left work events separately, even after we moved in together. When we finally 'came out' to a ➤

few coworkers, they were like, 'Uh, we know.'"

So why bother trying to keep things "secret" if everyone knows anyway? Because hiding a relationship makes it more taboo—which is far sexier than affairs that are out in the open. "As discreet as we were," Rachel says, "if we found ourselves alone in the elevator we'd make out and grope each other's asses. The risk of being caught both terrified and excited me." Bottom line: It's always fun to have a secret at work, especially when that secret is: "I'm boning you."

### The Boss and the Underling

Welcome to the most confusing and potentially dangerous office fling—the reason sexual harassment laws exist and indemnifying company contracts were created. When a boss is screwing a subordinate, everything that happens between them is scrutinized to the nth degree—if the underling gets promoted, it could be seen as favoritism; if they're fired, it could be discrimination. For this reason, wary male bosses are rarely the aggressors anymore.

Still, the Clintonian affair is alive and well—but more women are now taking the lead. Lily, a 27-year-old TV producer, had a yearlong affair with the head of her network. "He could fire me at any minute, which was, in a twisted way, a total turn-on." Lily says it was her "mission" to bed the boss—which she finally did late one night when she brought him a document to review. "I walked around to his side of the desk and brushed my breasts against his shoulder as I set it down. He took the hint and pulled me on top of him, pushing up my skirt so we could do it in his chair." Lily says she felt a sense of power knowing she'd seen the big cheese naked. "It was an equalizer, in a way, and gave me a sense of security. I figured he'd never fire me because he'd be scared I'd tell people about his lime green banana hammock."

Female bosses aren't afraid to move on underlings, either. "I screwed one of my interns," confesses Margo, a 31-year-old head recruiter. "I loved that he was intimidated by me because it meant I had control in bed, too. He told me I was the best lay of anyone he'd ever been with. Maybe he was just aiming to get hired—but I didn't give a shit."

### The Nuclear Affair

It's the kind of affair late-night cable flicks are made of. The nuclear affair begins with months of palpable sexual tension. Once one person finally—inevitably—makes a move, it's on. You two have sex in the ladies' room. And on your boss' desk. And on the fire escape. "The first time Rob and I hooked up, he went down on me in an emergency stairwell," says Carrie, 28, who works in ad sales. "After we were done, we realized there were security cameras there, but that still wasn't enough to stop us. He once fingered me in the copy room, and we fucked in the service elevator." They even did it on the



Best. Presentation. Ever.

office's conference room table. "At our staff meeting the next day, I kept picturing myself having an orgasm right there," Carrie adds, "and relishing the fact that no one had a clue."

The nuclear problem: The fallout is just as dramatic as the explosion, only infinitely messier. Crazy sex turns into blowout fights; coworkers are forced to take sides; one of you is either fired or leaves the job. "Spending 14 hours a day with Rob was too intense," Carrie says. "Our rock bottom was a screaming match outside our office. He called me a 'slut,' and I told him to go fuck himself—as people we worked with walked by, horrified. I found a new job a month later, and we never spoke again." The message: Mind-blowing sex always has a cost. If you don't mind paying for it with your sanity and your career, go for it.

### The Successful Merger

Some office flings turn out not to be flings at all—20 percent of them end in marriage. And

why not? From the second you meet, you two have something in common, and you spend years learning to problem-solve. "I recommend dating people from work," says Danielle, a 32-year-old publicist who married a former boss. "You spend every minute together—at work, at parties. It's a great way to see how someone handles stress and treats others."

In fact, lifetime unions forged in the workplace are so common now, many companies will turn a blind eye to any potential conflicts of interest—so long as the ball-and-chains keep things professional. "One of our head designers ended up marrying a colleague she reports to on a daily basis," says Teal Bragg, human resources director for a New York advertising agency. "But our policy is, as long as it doesn't affect production, we honestly don't care." Until the office divorce, of course, which will have you fighting over the house, the kids, and the corner office where you first consummated your insatiable burning attraction. ●

## Office Romances Through History

People have been fishing off the company pier for ages, with mixed results.

#### 1. King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella

The heirs to Aragon and Castile married in 1469 and jointly ruled a new united power called Spain. When the sex got stale, they masterminded the Spanish Inquisition, which is the kind of shit horny rich kids do for fun.



#### 2. Marie and Pierre Curie

Pervy Pierre came on to Marie Sklodowska in 1894, while she was still his student at the University of Paris. The couple got busy in the lab, discovering radioactivity and winning the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1903.



#### 3. Fleetwood Mac

Songstress Stevie Nicks left guitarist Lindsey Buckingham for drummer Mick Fleetwood, while singer Christine McVie cheated on bassist hubby John with—the band's lighting guy? Hear the details on their 1977 smash album, *Rumours!*



#### 4. NASA Astronauts

In early 2007, space-walker Will Oefelein dumped fellow astronaut Lisa Nowak for another woman. Big mistake. Nowak donned a diaper, grabbed a knife, and drove 950 miles, allegedly to kidnap the new girlfriend. Awkward!

