

*Love and Business*

Most of the public controversy about invasions of employees' privacy has centered on a company's attempt to find out if its workers are doing something illegal, such as using drugs. More pressing, however, is the practice by many companies of regulating its employees' lives in an area that is not simply legal, but also normal, healthy, and the source of great joy — personal relationships. Numerous corporations limit the kinds of relationships its employees may enter. In some cases, they are barred from dating co-workers; in other cases, competitors.

A major U.S. food corporation, for example, does not let its employees date one another. Nonetheless, two executives met and fell in love. Despite the fact that the man and woman worked in different parts of the company and had no formal business relationship with each other, their actions now jeopardized both of their jobs. For a year they lived together secretly. Before they publicly announced their plans to marry, however, the man left the company.

In 1982, the Coca-Cola Company fired Amanda Blake, a manager of data processing at the Coca-Cola bottler in Northampton, Massachusetts, when she refused to break her engagement with an accountant at a rival Pepsi bottler. An attorney representing the company said that she might have accidentally leaked

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1. Explain why this is an ethical issue. That is, how does it relate to the basic human needs of the various people involved?
2. Using a teleological approach, make a judgment about the ethical acceptability of the policies described regarding employee relationships. Be certain to take into account: a) long-term results as well as short-term results, and b) quality, type or kind of benefits and harm.

Explain your position in as much detail as you can. Anticipate and deal with possible objections.

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confidential information to her husband. In a similar case in 1979, Virginia Rulon-Miller lost her job as a marketing manager at IBM because she continued to date a former IBM account manager who now worked for a competitor. Former IBM Chairman Thomas J. Watson, Jr., however, at one time had said that "we have concern with an employee's off-the-job behavior only when it reduces his ability to perform regular job assignments." Rulon-Miller sued and received a judgment of \$300,000.

Critics of these restrictions claim that they are unwarranted intrusions into employees' private lives. Moreover, they argue that finding a suitable companion is not only critical to one's well-being but also can be so difficult that such restrictions are an unreasonable price to pay for a job. Proponents, however, argue that the matter is not so simple. Personal relationships between co-workers can lead to favoritism and even to an unfair competitive advantage over other workers. One member of the relationship may be in a position to pass along useful information that his or her partner's peers lack. And even if there are no problems when the relationship is going well, there may be significant problems if it sours. Particularly if the former lovers work together, their professional relationship may be affected. There may be tension, hostility, and difficulty communicating with each other in a way that affects their own performance and that of their colleagues. Relationships with competitors are seen as even more dangerous because of the risk of the spread of confidential information that could cost a company sales and, ultimately, jobs. ◆