



Dating a work colleague

A manager is attracted to a recent recruit. Is the relationship appropriate?

The story

Guinevere works in a state service department as a manager. She has been in the position for ten years and is in her 40s. She has just hired a junior analyst, Jack, who is in his early 20s and straight out of university.

Guinevere finds Jack attractive and decides to spend more time with him. She starts taking more of an active role in his projects, frequently helps him with problems, and introduces him to industry stakeholders and senior employees in other departments.

After a few weeks, Guinevere asks Jack out on a date. Jack is flustered and asks whether that would be appropriate. Guinevere says that it's okay and happens all the time. Jack agrees to the date, and they end up dating for a few months.

After the relationship ends, Jack admits to HR that he never felt comfortable in the relationship and felt that he had to agree to it because Guinevere is his boss. He was also concerned that the special treatment, such as being introduced to influential people, would stop if he did not date her.

The information used in this scenario is not factual – we created it for education and discussion. Any likeness to actual persons or events is coincidental.

Questions – Facilitator copy

1. What are the ethical issues around this situation?
 - ▽ Misuse of power and authority
 - ▽ Conflict of interest
 - ▽ Sexual harassment
2. Has Guinevere committed misconduct?
 - ▽ Yes, she entered into a relationship with a junior employee, where there was a significant power imbalance that made the junior colleague feel uncomfortable and powerless.
 - ▽ As a manager, her position requires her to maintain a professional and safe work environment. She misused this position of trust and power to enter into a relationship
3. What are the potential impacts for Guinevere, Jack and the state service department?
 - ▽ The potential impacts for Guinevere are that she faces internal disciplinary action, including demotion, pay-point decrease, sexual harassment training and possible termination. Guinevere may also face a sexual harassment lawsuit.
 - ▽ The potential impacts for Jack are significant trauma. Jack may no longer feel safe in the workplace and struggle to remain at his job due to fear, anxiety or a feeling of being disrespected or harassed. Jack may also suffer social consequences where his peers or seniors bully or ostracise him for the relationship. They may form the perception that he was 'sleeping his way to the top'.
 - ▽ The potential impacts for the department are negative public perception and media backlash. The public may believe that the department enables sexual harassment and abuse of office, resulting in loss of confidence in the integrity of the department. There may also be significant media scrutiny that damages the department's reputation.
4. What could be done to address the issues?
 - ▽ regular training for managers about appropriate use of their position and sexual harassment
 - ▽ establishing a clear and robust response to sexual harassment and making it clear to employees that sexual harassment and inappropriate relationships are not tolerated and should be reported to HR



The Commission can help

We are available to provide support and assistance with identifying, reporting, investigating, managing and preventing misconduct: prevention@integrity.tas.gov.au or 1300 720 289.

For more Misconduct Prevention resources go to www.integrity.tas.gov.au/resources