

Five Rules Men Need to Follow at The Office

Financial Times

Some simple guidance can help allay men's fears at work...

Rule #1: If you want to date a colleague, feel free to ask her. But if she says no, that's your answer. What if you just know in your gut that she actually wants to go out? Then you probably also know she can communicate that if she changes her mind. Remember, she's at work. She signed up to be your colleague, not your girlfriend. She's entitled to keep work relationships as work relationships.

Rule #2: Treat male and female colleagues equally. That may mean you have to change the way you interact with work colleagues. We all know that professional advancement often rests on social interactions, on the golf course, at drinks or dinner, or other social interactions. That means you need to reassess whether you are interacting with colleagues in a way that's comfortable for a broad range of people. If you bond by drinking after dark, you may want to shift to breakfast or lunch, or drink within a group setting and know your limit. What if you're on a business trip in a strange city with an attractive young female colleague? Make your intentions crystal clear, and think of your niece. You wouldn't hit on your niece.

Rule #3: Widespread panic about whether a guy can give a girl a compliment. You can say, "That's a nice dress," but not, "You look hot in that dress." " If you feel that compliments are making someone uncomfortable, cease and desist: it has become not a compliment but a power struggle.

Rule #4: Concerns sexual joking. In "Sexual Behavior at Work: Fun or Folly?", Jennifer Berdahl and Karl Aquino found that only 10 per cent of women enjoyed "ambient sexual behavior" such as sexual joking. More surprising is that only 46 per cent of men did. You are not entitled to subject your work colleagues to your sense of sexual humor as a condition of employment.

Rule #5: The final rule concerns touching. Don't do it. There are some exceptions. What if a colleague you're close to just returned from her mother's funeral and you're moved to give her a condolence hug? The question then becomes: how good are you at reading social cues? If you can tell when someone doesn't want a hug, or when it's inappropriate, then you already know the answer. If you're even slightly unsure, then ask before or stick with your sympathetic words. Asking for consent isn't awkward. Invading someone's personal space is.