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## FRIENDSHIPS AND ROMANCE IN THE WORKPLACE

In honour of Valentine's Day, let's take a look at friendships and romance in the workplace.

Now here is a dilemma. We preach teamwork in the workplace, and we want everyone to get along, but what happens when the line gets crossed into something more serious, and where is that line? First, let's look at friendships. Nothing wrong with that, right? From an organizational perspective, probably not, as long as the friendship is not taking away from work. If you find friends spending too much time planning their weekend outing, then perhaps something needs to be said. Most people, however, get it, and it's not a problem. Where friendships may become a bigger issue, to both the organization and the individual, is when it comes time for promotion.

For many reasons, it's usually best to promote someone from within. You know them, they know you, and it's a lot less expensive to do this. As an organization, you get to recoup some of your investment in the individual, and it's usually good for morale. Where there may be problems is if the newly-promoted employee ends up supervising friends. Is the individual equipped to do that? Will they be able to cross the boundary between friend and supervisor? Any new supervisor faces challenges, but when you go from colleague to supervisor, there are a whole new set. The new supervisor has to be sure to avoid favoritism, or even the appearance of it. He or she must also avoid the opposite pitfall, that of being too harsh on the new staff



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## IS YOUR BENEFIT PLAN BENEFITING YOU?

Looking at saving some money? Who isn't? When was the last time you reviewed your benefit plan, or even met with your insurance broker, if you are using one?

Benefit plans are an important part of any compensation plan. They are a key element in the attracting and retaining of em-

ployees, and as it becomes more competitive with regards to attracting and keeping the best staff, a good benefit plan will be a major asset. Once you have one, however, it is important to review it on a regular basis, in terms of both cost and utilization.

Many organizations get their

benefit plans through insurance brokers, who will help you find benefit coverage and will meet with you to go over its utilization. This is a valuable service, as most organizations, particularly the smaller ones, don't have the time or resources to do what is necessary to contact potential benefit suppliers, and

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to appear to be tough or to prove that they are up to the job. When making a decision to promote from within, it is a good idea to address these issues, and to find out the potential candidate's game plan for dealing with them. And now to the big issue- office romances and relationships. A lot of organizations have official policies discouraging them, and we all know how effective those policies are. Any place people get together, the chances for romance exist, and if we expect staff to be together for any length of time, we should not be surprised that things happen. In most cases, there is no issue, as the individuals involved are mature adults and know what is expected of them. There are those situations, however, when the line gets crossed, and actions are warranted. This is the case now, more than ever, as employers must deal with the implications of Bill 168, as they pertain to harassment and violence in the workplace.

Relationships are great, but there is always the chance that they may be rocky, and even end. In some cases, this causes problems in the workplace, even when the two individuals involved work in separate organizations. It's worse, however, when they both work in the same place. While these situations, ranging from unwanted attention to outright stalking, have always existed, and have always required employer attention, there is now a legislated requirement to do so. In essence, employers have been told that they must get involved in these situations. If they are made aware of a domestic situation, certain steps have to be taken to safeguard staff, and this often involves the privacy of the parties involved.



What can employers do regarding friendships and romance in the workplace? Not a lot in terms of prevention. And if you think of it, the issue is not usually the staff getting together, it's when they break up. From this perspective, the key is to make sure that your organization is in compliance with its legal responsibilities, in terms of providing a safe and harassment free workplace.

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## THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your support of **JM Box Consulting Services** over the past year. This support has shown itself in a number of different ways.

Perhaps the most unique show of support in 2010 came in the form of a nomination for an award. I was nominated personally for an award sponsored by a local business magazine. The award, one of many that this magazine gives out annually in their version of the Windsor business Oscars, was "Powerhouse Professional", and was intended to recognize "...a local business owner that has what it takes to keep his/her company successful in today's tough times". As **JM Box Consulting Services** was initially set up to provide cost-effective Human Resources Services, it was an honour to be nominated. In the format the magazine chose to use, it called upon others to nominate potential winners, with the eventual winner being chosen by a board. I was quite gratified to learn that quite a number of you who were aware of the award did vote for me. While I did not win, I greatly appreciated your support. I'm sure that you have all heard the saying "the honour is in the nomination, not the win". In this case the saying was true- I was nominated by you, and that means a lot. And not winning saved me the cost of having to rent a tux for the awards ceremony!

Your support has also been shown in a number of different ways. Of course, those of you who are clients of **JM Box Consulting Services** are showing your support by putting your confidence in the services offered. Many of you have also been very helpful in telling others about the services, and the business has grown as a result. While not all who receive this newsletter are clients, many of you have been very supportive of it and its content. That is very encouraging, and means a lot.



All of this support is greatly appreciated, and it is the goal of **JM Box Consulting Services** to continue to deserve it.

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to deal with them on a regular basis. In some cases, the broker may act as a third party administrator on your behalf, whereby benefit claims are sent directly to them, rather than the insurance company, to take care of. There is a cost for this service, and it is important that you understand its cost versus the claims being sent directly to the insurance company. Are you paying for a convenience that your staff can do without? This cost, and all costs associated with the administration of a benefits plan, should be reviewed with the broker on a regular basis. This includes going to market every few years to see what you can get from the various insurance companies. You may not end up switch companies, but just the process of going through the review can often make your existing insurance company sharpen its own pencil to provide you with a better rate so that you don't make the change.

A valuable tool that is provided by many insurance companies is a regular listing of benefit utilization, with special emphasis on medications. This information does not identify who is using what benefit, but does give you some general idea of what is being prescribed and paid for under the plan. While this review may help you understand the cost of benefits, it can also give you a picture of what is going on in your organization. For example, if anti-depressants are by far the most prescribed form of medication being paid for under the benefit plan, which may tell something about how your staff are feeling.

Another important thing to look for in terms of utilization is what is not being utilized. Are there parts of your benefit plan that you are paying for that are not being used? For example, does the 'out of country' benefit actually get used? And additionally, are there benefits out there that your plan does not have that would be more useful to your staff? These are questions that you can ask your broker. There may be alternatives to what you are currently paying for that would better suit your workforce, particularly based on factors such as its age and gender. For example, there are benefit plans out there now where employees are given a certain amount of money to 'spend' on benefits within a plan, and they can choose where to spend it. For example, a spouse's plan may have better dental coverage, but your plan have great life insurance rates. Your employee may then opt not to include dental coverage, but goes with more life insurance, thereby getting a better benefit that fits his/her life-style better.



If you don't have a benefit plan, or are finding it too expensive, take the time to contact an insurance broker or look for other alternatives. For example, in Windsor, Ontario, the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce offers benefit packages designed for small organizations to its membership, which can include not-for-profit organizations. Checking out the advantages of combining the insurance plans of several similar organizations to take advantage of economies of scale may also be another idea. In any event, having a good, cost-effective and employee-friendly benefit plan is a great way of ensuring happy employees.

## Downloadable Diamonds

**The purpose of this section of our newsletter is to alert readers to some resources available from the internet that they might not be aware of.**

Many employers these days, because they have to or because they think it is the right thing to do (it is) require new and often existing employees to provide Criminal Record Checks. On rare occasions you will get one that references receiving a pardon. If you are looking for information on pardons, such as how long do they take to get, you can check should check out [www.pardons.org](http://www.pardons.org) . This website is set up by Pardons Canada, and deals with a variety of pardon-related issues, including travel and employment.



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[www.jmboxconsulting.com](http://www.jmboxconsulting.com)



## An Overview of Our Services

**JM Box Consulting Services** provides innovative, cost-effective Human Resources support and services that assist clients in dealing with their issues and challenges with confidence. Together, we will resolve issues one at a time, either through consultation, training or working together on necessary projects. These services are designed to be of greatest service to small to medium size organizations, including the municipal, health care, charitable, not-for-profit and small business sectors. Based in Windsor, Ontario, **JM Box Consulting Services** can meet the needs of clients throughout the Province.

**JM Box Consulting Services** takes the approach of meeting client expectations by identifying the gap between the desired goals and current realities, to discover the best ways of eliminating that gap- not just for the present, but for the future as well.

## Services

**E-Consulting-** providing clients with quick, cost-effective access to Human Resources expertise through the use of e-mail and telephone communications, without the expense of or supplemental to internal Human Resources staff.

**Project Management Services-** to provide project management and expertise on matters such as job evaluation/pay equity, wage/salary administration systems, policy and procedure review and development, and organization redesign and restructuring.

**Training Services-** to address client needs that are best addressed through training specific to the needs of the organization, such as Violence in the Workplace, Working in a Respectful Workplace, and Organizational Community Presence.

## EMPLOYEES SAY THE DARNDDEST THINGS

If you have heard an employee say something that strikes you as a little odd or out of the ordinary, please send it to us at [info@jmboxconsulting.com](mailto:info@jmboxconsulting.com) for inclusion in this feature.

Same quote from two different employees at two different times:

Employee 1-caught working at her second job just hours after calling in sick at her first job.

Employee 2- caught at a party at a supervisor's house just hours after calling in sick.

"I wasn't feeling well, but I felt better later, and decided that it was ok to come here."