

## RPM TBT – Conflicts of Interest in the Workplace

Conflicts of Interest generally arise in the workplace when an employee has a loyalty to two or more groups or individuals.

It is important that employees do not allow their personal gain or private interests – whether financial, personal or otherwise to conflict, or appear to conflict, with their duties and responsibilities to the company. Even perceived conflicts of interest can cause suspicion or reputational damage for an individual or organization.

It is important that we keep conflicts of interest in perspective, they are not unusual nor necessarily prohibited. What is crucial is that, as an employee, you know how to recognize and you disclose Conflicts of Interest that you know about. Transparency and communication are critical when handling conflicts of interest, so it is important that if you are aware of a conflict of interest you report it to your supervisor, management, or HR.

One of the most common conflicts of interest are workplace relationships, such as family members or romantic or sexual relationships.

Under RPM's Conflict of Interest Policy, a "Family Member" is defined as a parent, child, sibling, spouse, aunt, uncle, niece, nephew, grandchild, grandparent or cousin of employee; and includes in-laws, foster or step-relatives of these family relationships.

Workplace relationships should never cross the line and become inappropriate. It is important that managers and supervisors, or anyone who has influence, input or decision making over an employee's performance rating, work assignments, pay, benefits, promotion, or other matters should not be involved in a personal relationship with that employee. It is the responsibility of management to ensure that adequate controls are in place to manage any conflict of interest in the best interests of the employee and the company.

Personal relationships in the workplace that are not adequately disclosed or managed can lead to concerns about:

- Abuse of power
- Harassment
- Favouritism
- Bias

Let's go through a scenario with a workplace relationship.

Sylvia joined the team six months ago. Her supervisor Jon is single, Sylvia gets on great with Jon. They started meeting for lunch to discuss business, but in the last few months they have started dating. Neither of them has raised their relationship to management as they don't want to risk their jobs, or end the relationship, so have decided to keep the relationship secret. In this situation, what should Jon and Sylvia do?

1. Stop dating.
2. Discuss with human resources.

3. Keep the relationship a secret; it's no one's business.
4. Look for another role in the company then let management know about the relationship once they take the new role.

### **#2 IS CORRECT!**

Personal relationships at work have repercussions for the workplace. It is essential that employees assure their own behavior is professional. Any change in relationship status among employees should be reported appropriately.

Disclosing the conflict doesn't mean that the two employees in this example are in trouble, that they'll need to stop dating, or otherwise will face negative consequences. What's important is that they'll have followed company policy in disclosing the relationship and allowed the company to put appropriate controls in place such that there are no perceived or actual conflicts at work due to their relationship. If they don't inform the company, can you think of some issues that could result?

(Sample answers: preferential treatment or scheduling for Sylvia; Jon may evaluate Sylvia more favorably during her performance evaluation or even provide her with a wage increase that is more than others' wage increases. Even if Jon doesn't do those things, other associates may perceive that he does based on their relationship.

With Conflicts of Interest transparency is key, ensure that you disclose Conflicts of Interest to your supervisor.

Should you have concerns about reporting concerns remember the Company prohibits retaliation against employees who make reports in good faith.