

Attracting trouble

Staff affairs can have undesirable results, especially if love hits the rocks and trade and morale suffer, so it is wise to take a stance on romance says **Andrew Don**

Fuller's ESB, contrary to what you might think, does not stand for Extra Sexy Bombshell or Bloke.

You may think, joking aside, there is no harm done if manager Mick gets it on with Saturday girl Sharon, but from my own experience as a student barman, when Sharon jilts Mick several months later, everyone suffers the fallout.

Tenant landlords and landladies need morose Mick crying into customers' beer like they need a rent hike, and customers do not pay to see a miserable face behind the bar.

Then, as Mick's grief turns to anger, he takes out his misery on the other staff, he snaps at the punters, and Sharon, who has a great way with the customers, quits.

Romance, or rather the end of it, is not good for business.

Peter Caro, full-time barman at The Ferry Inn freehouse in Tenterden, Kent, says: "We get staff who have chemistry because they like working with each other."

He says that can be good because it means happy staff, but he says that

relationships cross the line when they get too physical and the customers notice, although he adds quickly this has not been an issue at The Ferry Inn.

"You would have to sit them down and say you are very happy for their emotional situation, but that they should keep it private.

"It is as off-putting for customers as it is when you get a couple in the bar who kiss and cuddle all night," he says.

Human nature

Kate Russell, managing director of Russell HR Consulting, points out that falling in love is human nature, so it is inevitable that the issue of relationships in the workplace will occur.

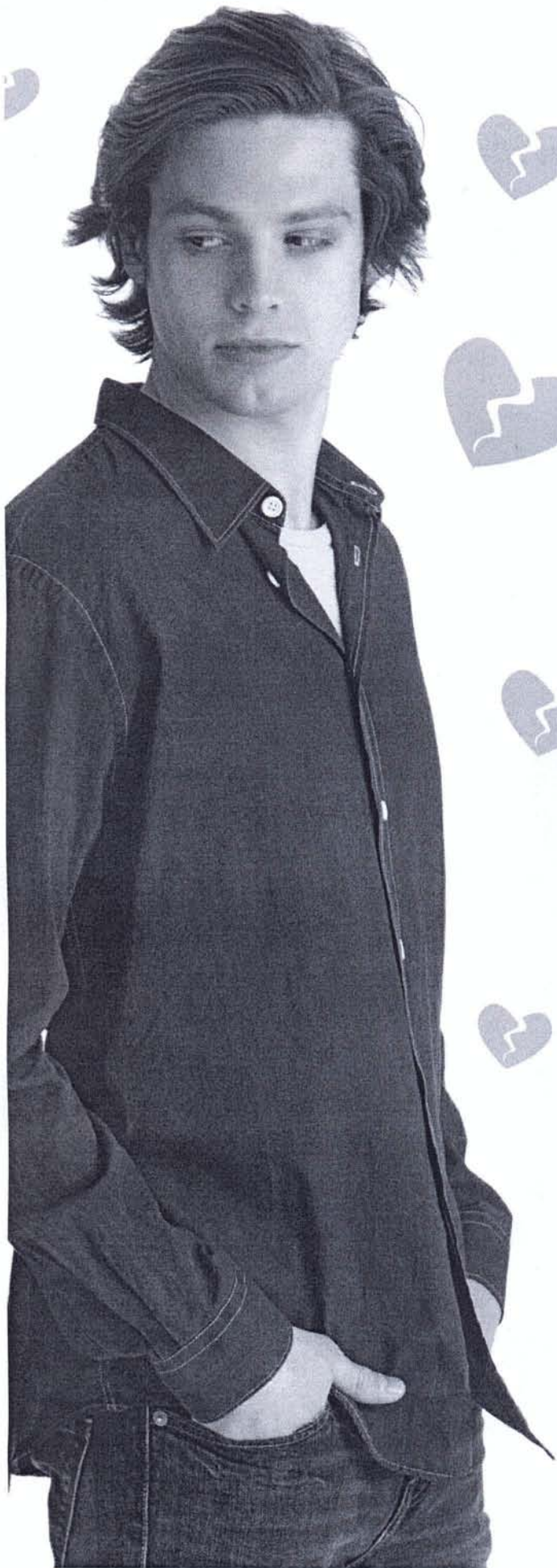
“Romance, or rather the end of it, is not good for business

Romance rules

- Introduce a workplace relationship policy
- Identify the roles in the organisation where disclosure of workplace relationships would be required
- Reserve your right to move one or both employees in the event of possible conflict of interest or workplace issue that could arise because of this relationship (impossible for one-pub freehouses)
- Issue general workplace rules such as no intimate behaviour when at work
- Set out the duty to disclose relationships between employees or employees and customers when it poses a risk to the business or a conflict of interest for the employee
- Have a grievance policy where an employee who is adversely affected by another employee's behaviour can make a complaint
- Publish the penalty for breaching the policy

Source: Russell HR Consulting





She warns, however, that relationships between co-workers can cause trouble. "New relationships are often lovey-dovey, so they can become a distraction in the workplace and irritate the heck out of everyone else.

"With a couple spending considerable and perhaps unnecessary time together during working hours or sharing public displays of affection, tensions can arise. When relationships sour there are often allegations of bullying, victimisation or sexual harassment, prevention is better than cure so make sure you have a framework in place to deal with workplace relationships," Russell says [see panel].

When a relationship gets physical on company time, dismissal can be a reasonable outcome. Russell cites the case of GM Packaging V Haslem last year in which two employees were dismissed for engaging in sexual activity on company premises after hours. The employees further sealed their own doom as a result of a recorded conversation from the same evening in which they had discussed the managing director in derogatory terms.

Both were issues of misconduct and the Employment Appeal Tribunal found that dismissal for these was fair and reasonable.

Policy

Martin Caffrey, operations director of the Federation of Licensed Victuallers Associations, doubts most pubs would have written policies as recommended by HR Consulting.

"It would be in the staff rule books... if there was one. It wouldn't be in staff contracts. It's a difficult issue," he says.

"Negatives would be claims of unfair bias both ways, such as being given extra shifts or being allowed to be lax in their duties. There is also a risk of a sexual harassment claim being brought. And if a barman or barmaid is seen to be very friendly to a customer, this can make the other partner jealous which creates issues."

However, Caffrey points out that when couples are married or in a long-term partnerships, they can prove a highly effective business team, although these relationships can also prove a problem when they break down and it comes to assigning leases, settling debts and selling up.

Neil Diamond sang "Love on the rocks, ain't no big surprise" when he appeared in *The Jazz Singer* in 1980.

However, big surprises are not what you need in your pub unless it's a Lottery win.

Slow Comfortable Screws should be reserved strictly for cocktails!



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