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Press Releases - 2006 Jul 17

“MORE SEX PLEASE, WE’RE BRITISH”

- Over half of British bosses (53 per cent) believe that it is not an abuse of power to have a relationship with a more junior colleague
- 83 per cent of bosses believe that it is perfectly acceptable to look for a future partner at work
- Almost a quarter (23 per cent) of British businesswomen have been groped or fondled by a client or senior colleague
- 69 per cent of managers believe that life was less confusing when people only shook hands in business

In the wake of the John Prescott affair, a narrow majority (53 per cent) of British business executives believe that it is not an abuse of power to have a relationship with a more junior colleague, according to a survey on relationships in business by **The Aziz Corporation** – the UK’s leading executive communications consultancy. An even greater number believe that a relationship is acceptable with a more senior colleague or client (55 per cent), or with a colleague of the same seniority (73 per cent).

The study demonstrates a relaxed attitude to workplace relationships with the overwhelming majority (83 per cent) of bosses finding it perfectly acceptable to look for a future partner at work. Indeed, 29 per cent have been involved in a long term relationship with a colleague, and 35 per cent have had a ‘fling’ with someone at work.

Professor **Khalid Aziz**, Chairman of The Aziz Corporation, comments: “Contrary to the many comments that in business John Prescott would have been dismissed, bosses in today’s Britain seem to take a more relaxed view. It appears it is now acceptable to mix business and pleasure, reflecting the fact that you are likely to spend more time with your colleagues than with your family or friends. The shared intensity of the workplace has, for a long time, acted to ignite passions and with our culture of long working hours, this only looks set to continue.”

The research also reveals bosses’ own experiences of office fraternisation. 43 per cent have fancied someone at work and not known how to act upon it, 44 per cent have had sexual fantasies about a colleague, and 28 per cent have sent a flirtatious email to someone they work with. A startling one in eight (13 per cent) confess to having had sex or ‘intimate relations’ in the office itself.

Professor **Khalid Aziz** says:

“The results show that the workplace has become a hotbed of flirtatious fun and sexual shenanigans. Whilst office life may have become more relaxed, people need to consider the possible repercussions of an office romance. A quick fling may not communicate a professional attitude and could stifle career progression. Whatever the official policy may be, you can guarantee that directors will still want decisions to be made with the head – and not the heart.”

When it comes to harassment or abusive behaviour at work the study highlights a clear gender bias. Whilst 14 per cent of men have had to tolerate inappropriate behaviour or comments

from a client or superior because they did not want to jeopardise the working relationship, this rises to almost half (43 per cent) of women. This gender disparity extends to acts of physical harassment, with 23 per cent of women admitting to having been groped or fondled by a client or more senior colleague, compared to just 8 per cent of men. 52 per cent of women and 30 per cent of men have had to turn down the unwelcome advances of a colleague or client.

The research reveals some blurred boundaries and a general confusion about how familiar one can, or should, be with colleagues or clients. The majority of people (69 per cent) agree that life was less confusing when people only shook hands in business and 40 per cent feel uncomfortable at the prospect of kissing on the cheek when greeting a colleague or client.

Professor **Khalid Aziz** comments:

"The boundaries of 'normal' business behaviour have become increasingly hazy and many companies find themselves in uncharted territory. It can be difficult, and indeed unlawful, to ban workplace relationships and ensuring clear guidelines in which both the employee and the company feel protected from sexual harassment is more easily said than done. The recent decision by the Equal Opportunities Commission whereby lewd emails now constitute a form of sexual harassment should be a warning to workers that sending raunchy emails may get them a rather different response to the one they bargained for."

- Ends -

Professor **Khalid Aziz** of The Aziz Corporation is available for interview on this story. If you would be interested in speaking with Khalid then please visit our [Contact us](#) page.

Notes to Editors

### **The Aziz Corporation**

The Aziz Corporation is the UK's leading independent executive communications consultancy. Its mission is to add value to businesses by ensuring their people are effective communicators. Consultancy services offered by the Aziz Corporation include presentation skills, media training, crisis management, image consultancy and voice development.

About the survey

This survey was completed by 200 senior managers and directors of major companies based across the United Kingdom.