Office Romances in the post-#MeToo era.

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The #MeToo campaign has been quite successful in bringing in light the yet ignored, tolerated, and even hushed practices of workplace misconducts which had been rampant against the women in the corporate scene. But, now, with the firing of McDonald’s CEO, Steve Easterbook, it can be very evidently accentuated how even consensual relationships in the workplace are drawing greater scrutiny.

Workplace romance, which has been a constant theme in the movies and an undying fantasy over generations, has now become a taboo. Steve Easterbook is not a sole example. Last year, the then Intel CEO Brian Krzanich had to resign from his job due to similar revelations. Now it is very interesting to note that Krzanich’s predecessor, Paul Otellini, was married to one of the Intel’s employees. This clearly reflects how attitudes regarding romance in the workplace are changing.

This metamorphosis is an aftermath of the MeToo campaign. The organizations have now become more vigilant, and the employees now are under a constant scrutiny.

When employees see that even the chief executives of the organizations are not being exempted from this microscopic scrutiny, they start to avoid any forms of romance or the events that could lead to it. This can trigger unforeseen negative consequences. And one of them is that the male employees become wary of forging professional relationships with their female colleagues. This can seriously thwart the advancement of women to senior leadership. Let’s see how.

According to a survey done jointly by LeanIn.Org and SurveyMonkey, “60% of male managers areuncomfortable participating in a common work activity with a woman, such as mentoring, working alone, or socializing together. Senior-level male employees are more hesitant to have one-on-one meetings, to travel together for work, or to have work dinners with a junior female than with a junior male employee. 36% of men have accepted that they have straight-down avoided mentoring a woman.”

Everyone understands the importance of socializing in work and making connections with your seniors, but with the appearance of MeToo, and the fear and reservations it has caused among men, it is getting more and more difficult for women to build professional relationship with their male colleagues, and this is seriously slowing down their progress towards the positions of leadership, which is in contrast to what the allies of MeToo have rallied for.

Women must understand that it is the need of the hour to bring fairness to sexual harassment cases. Organizations must also recognize the necessity of dealing with false accusations very seriously. Because clearly, only one-sided reforms will only backfire.