

# Pat Answers

By Pat Grigadean

**Dear Pat:**

*Every time I turn around some co-worker is collecting money for something - kids' sports, walks for every disease under the rainbow, bowling for babies. It never ends! If I don't contribute, they'll think I'm hard-hearted. But I'm on tight budget. How can I hold on to my money?*

Boy, if I had a nickel for every time this comes up! This is a problem for many people. Unfortunately, most don't speak up so the financial drain keeps growing for everyone. Be a hero in your office! Announce that, as much as you care about your colleagues and their special events and causes, you must limit your financial contributions. I'd suggest making this announcement at a staff meeting or another neutral time - not when you're being asked to contribute. Then, next time you're asked, just look apologetic, shrug, and say, "Sorry." Co-workers who are also feeling the pinch will bless you for setting the precedent. [p.s. Some departments have a "birthday fund", where everyone contributes a small amount for a shared birthday cake or card for those having a birthday that month. Maybe something like that could work for yours.]

**Dear Pat:**

*The pregnant woman in our department is getting a better chair, more breaks, and more considerations than the rest of us. We don't think this is fair? What can we do without blasting motherhood?*

While pregnancy isn't a disability and isn't generally covered under the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), there may be medical reasons that require your employer to make certain accommodations for the employee. But even if that's not the case, your employer may be making a sound business decision by offering assistance to an employee who needs some extra help temporarily in order to remain on the job and work efficiently. I say, be supportive of your co-worker. One day you may be the one who needs a little extra consideration.

**Dear Pat:**

*I've witnessed a co-worker taking home office supplies. A pen or pencil is bad enough but now it's reams of copy paper and a spare keyboard. I've joked with him that I'd rat on him. He just laughs and says I should do it, too. I'm tired of watching company money (which could be used to give me a raise) walk out the door. If I tell anyone, he'll know I was the one to report him and that would make things awkward. Suggestions?*

Just one. Stop joking with him and tell him you're serious. Tell him what you've told me: That you resent his taking money out of your paycheck. Let him know that you will not sit idly by and watch him continue this illegal behavior. And if you witness his stealing again, report him to your supervisor. Believe me, if things become awkward, it will be for him, not you.

**Dear Pat:**

*I have been working here for several years and have recently been promoted to manager. I'm excited about the opportunity, but now I supervise people who used to be co-workers. Most of them have been very supportive, but a few have become a little cool toward me. The real problem is that one of my new "subordinates" is also a friend. He and I hang out after work and often have lunch together. How can I keep my friend compromising my role as manager?*

**Are co-workers driving you crazy? Do your employees need an attitude adjustment? Is your boss out of touch? If work isn't what you want it to be, send your questions to:**

**askpatanswers@aol.com**

**Pat Answers**

**1712 E. Riverside Drive #160**

**Austin, TX 78741**

*Pat Grigadean is a professional mediator, trainer, and employee-relations specialist. In consultation with Haven Street-Allen, SPHR, a human resources professional with over 30 years experience, she provides practical advice for resolving problems in the workplace.*

Balancing social and work relationships is always challenging, but when there are different levels of power and authority, it can be especially hard. By continuing to have a close personal relationship with your employee, you run several risks. The most obvious is the perception on the part of other employees that you are giving preferential treatment to your "friend" whenever favorable employment decisions are made regarding him. Did he really deserve that raise, or is it just that he's your pal? In addition to the risk of misperception, there is also the risk that you may actually treat him better without realizing it. It's hard for most of us to separate our actions from our emotions. When a manager likes and trusts someone, that person can seem like the logical choice for important assignments, etc., even though it might be a better management decision to pick someone who is talented, though perhaps less personable, or who needs to gain experience. Another risk is that you may be reluctant to discipline your employee/friend when necessary for fear of seeming "bossy". And you should also consider the difficult position in which you place him. He may become isolated from his current - your former - peers because of your relationship. Or he might find it difficult to either accept or appropriately challenge your authority. I'm not saying it's impossible to be friends with a subordinate. But it can be very difficult. So, my advice is to tell him that, at least until the two of you are more firmly established in your new work roles, you need to limit your social interactions to things that involve the entire group. If he really is your friend, he'll understand. Welcome to the bittersweet world of management.

*The responses in this column are Pat Grigadean's opinions. They do not represent legal advice nor do they necessarily reflect the policies of your organization. Employment matters can be quite intricate and have serious consequences. Before taking any personnel action, we recommend that you consult your Office of Human Resources.*

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Pat Grigadean  
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