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## Five ways to work with relatives on the team

Working with relatives at the workplace can either be fun or a nightmare. Many organisations discourage it because very often, the personal can ruin the professional. Still, if people stick to certain ground rules, they can maintain the fine balance and even work their way to the top.

### **Talk before you hire**

You may think a family member merits a job in your team or company, so go right ahead. Just because he is a relative doesn't lessen his talent or capabilities for a job. But before you do that, have a frank discussion with the individual, and explain that it's a plain professional deal. He is not getting hired because of the relationship you share but because of his knowledge and skills, and he has to go through the same process as others.

"It's important to set the tone right at the outset. There is nothing personal in it. That's the rule to follow even for employee references," says K Sudarshan, managing partner, EMA Partners International, India.

### **Keep things above board**

After you have decided to refer a relative to your organisation, disclose it to the top management immediately. There should be no ambiguity on this. Tell them the hiring will follow the established route and no compromises would be made on that. This will help wipe off the claim of favouritism, if any and establish your credentials as free and fair. "Transparency is the most important thing in such situations.

**If you are fair, people should know you are," says Ronesh Puri, MD, Executive Access, India. Two relatives working for a South-based retail firm learnt that the hard way two years ago. The two were mid-level managers in the same team, and got fired after the company found out they were closely related. The firm had a strict policy against hiring relatives.**

### **Don't publicise the relationship**

Don't go to town talking about your relationship. Keep home and office separate. Avoid being in each other's Facebook friends' list, posting family pictures on social networking sites or hanging out only with the family member. Flaunting the family link will only raise eyebrows, which is unwarranted. You don't want people to suspect you of bias towards an individual and neglecting the rest of the team. "Family bonding can happen at home, one doesn't need to drag it to office. One has to be very careful about this or it will jeopardise professional relationships in office," says Sudarshan.

### **Draw the fine line**

When in office you should be the professional you are expected to be. Discussing personal issues and conflicts at the workplace and professional life at home is a recipe for disaster. "It's not a happy scene to be found fighting over personal disagreements in office. It will give the professional a bad name.

Similarly, one must steer clear of office problems at family dos as relatives tend to hype things up for fun. The result is an irreparable relationship at work," says Sanjay Pandit, MD, Manpower India.

### **Be objective**

It's not only the hiring; every move should be fair and transparent. Be it opportunities for subordinates, approving ideas or appraisals — blood relatives can't decide the direction. After all, bosses will change, and will organisations. And then, only merit will count.