

# When Policy Is Not Enough: A Workplace Romance That Became a Crisis

## Embryo Template

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### **Positioning note:**

This embryo is framed around **organizational failure, policy enforcement, and duty of care**, **not** individual pathology or guilt. Language is deliberately careful (“alleged,” “according to prosecutors,” “reported”).

### Key Themes

1. Workplace Romance & Power Imbalance
2. Duty of Care & Employer Liability
3. Employee Mental Health & Risk Indicators
4. Policy Enforcement Failure
5. Ethics & Governance in High-Status Roles

### Hook:

In December 2025, the University of Michigan terminated its head football coach following an internal investigation that cited credible violations of the university’s zero-tolerance policy regarding inappropriate relationships with staff. Within weeks, the situation escalated beyond employment policy into the criminal justice system, raising disturbing questions not only about individual conduct, but about institutional responsibility.

### Case Context

At the time of his termination, Sherrone Moore was serving in one of the most visible leadership roles in collegiate athletics. According to public statements by university leadership, an internal investigation concluded that Moore had engaged in an inappropriate relationship with a staff member, violating established university policy designed to prevent power-based coercion and conflicts of interest.

Universities typically maintain strict guidelines governing romantic relationships between supervisors and subordinates, particularly in environments characterized by prestige, pressure, and asymmetrical power. These policies are intended to protect employees, preserve institutional integrity, and reduce legal exposure.

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### **Escalation of the Incident**

Following the termination, Moore faced criminal charges including home invasion, stalking, and breaking and entering. Prosecutors alleged that after the staff member ended the relationship and reported it to the university, Moore engaged in threatening behavior, including statements about harming himself in her presence. He was subsequently arrested and released on bond.

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The public revelation of these allegations intensified scrutiny of the university's role. Stakeholders questioned whether earlier intervention, monitoring, or enforcement could have mitigated harm to the employee and reduced organizational risk.

### Focused Closing Hook

As the university confronted reputational damage and questions of liability, a broader issue emerged: when employers fail to enforce relationship boundaries and assess behavioral risk signals, how far does their duty of care extend?

### Learning Outcomes:

After completing this case, students should be able to:

1. **LO1:** Identify risks associated with workplace romance in high-power-imbalance environments.
2. **LO2:** Evaluate employer responsibilities related to employee protection and mental health risk indicators.
3. **LO3:** Analyze ethical and legal implications of delayed or insufficient policy enforcement.
4. **LO4:** Recommend organizational safeguards to prevent escalation of workplace relationship risks.

### Outline:

1. **Hook:** Termination for policy violation
2. **Context:** Power, prestige, and policy expectations
3. **Escalation:** Criminal allegations and organizational exposure
4. **Return to Hook:** Institutional accountability and prevention failures

### Discussion Questions:

1. **DQ1 (LO1):** What risks are inherent in workplace romances involving supervisory authority?
2. **DQ2 (LO2):** What warning signs might indicate elevated mental health or safety risks?
3. **DQ3 (LO3):** At what point does failure to enforce policy become organizational negligence?
4. **DQ4 (LO4):** What preventive controls could organizations implement without violating privacy?

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