

# VIEW FROM THE CHEAP SEATS

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## **Boeing and Banging**

*Boeing's CEO had an affair and got fired. Maybe a career in advertising would suit him better*

This week, Boeing CEO Harry Stonecipher was fired for having an affair with a female company executive. And once again, corporate policies, ethics and conduct are under scrutiny.

Affairs among high-powered people and their business associates are nothing new. Jack Welch of GE had one. Rudy Giuliani had one as mayor of New York City. Some people are just drunk on power. But in the advertising industry, it seems, such behavior is more pervasive up and down the totem pole.

If there's anything the ad industry produces more of than TV spots or junk mail, it's salacious gossip. And I've heard, as I'm sure you have as well, any number of tawdry rumors of CEOs getting their swerve on at a Christmas party, or other employees doing it in or out of the office.

Our business has all the ingredients for a stew of sexual tension: Long hours, frequent travel, loose ethical standards, young horny employees, heavy drinking, and the general freedom to say almost anything on one's mind in the spirit of "ideation" or "concepting."

Even some ad industry lingo is suggestive:

"Can you mount that?"

"I think you need to push that further."

"We have 2 good ones. We need a third."

It's no accident that a disproportionate number of people in the ad biz are married to other ad people, or creative types in general. Some are legendary: in 1967, Mary Wells married Harding Lawrence, who was her client at Braniff. Now that's superior account service.

There are no across-the-board ad industry standards about these kinds of issues (just like there are no standards for anything else.) Interestingly, I actually know of a few agencies that have a policy of not hiring two spouses. And there are some agencies that were started by husband-and-wife teams.

But it's also possible that something is seriously out of whack in our society, or in our industry, when there's no work/life balance. When so much of our energy is spent on our jobs, and so much time is spent with our co-workers, our families and friends don't get the attention they deserve. So it becomes hard to meet people outside of work if you're single, and way too easy to get involved with people at work if you're married.

There are other potential consequences to a sexually charged work environment. One former writer's assistant on "Friends" is suing for harassment because she was subjected to hearing "coarse, vulgar and demeaning language" in the writers' room. The defense maintains that such talk is part of the creative process. And I'll buy that argument, but still, some people have less tolerance for sex talk and we need to be cognizant of that.

So in the interest of self-preservation, companies like Boeing, which have more conservative environments, will probably re-evaluate their personnel policies and trying to maintain a zero-tolerance stance in the wake of the Stonecipher incident. But I don't think we'll see a lot of stricter fraternization codes in ad agencies.

After all, it's one way of ensuring where the next generation of ad talent will come from.