

What do you think of internet dating?

It is quite a wonderful study in social-anthropology. I have met some great people and some crazy people. It is amazing and incredible.

I have collected the comments that men & women have sent me about their experiences in dating and put them together. I am enclosing it for an FYI, below: Please send me your comments to add to it. pretty interesting... It certainly helped me understand some of this internet dating stuff from someone else's perspective. I disagree with some but most of it seems to be how 90% of the people think that I have met and it is the same experience 90% of them told me they had with people they met. Feel free to pass it around to friends. I have now interjected other notes that people have sent me after they read the original version. Most people seem to complain about the hard part of dating. The marketing studies show that 70% of the women and 40% of the men cancel or drop their subscriptions after a month or two because of frustration or overload. Clearly it is a process that takes some work but the same studies show that many people have gotten married or entered Long Term Relationships (LTR's) from it. If some things baffle you about the HUGE differences between men and women, this might clear up a few things.

THIS IS NOT WHAT I SAY!!! THIS IS WHAT PEOPLE ON HERE TOLD ME:

"The unofficial Internet Dating Rules and Notes

Rev. 2.04:

The sociology of internet dating.

AND THE WOMEN SAID-

"The process can be both exciting and heartbreaking.. You will meet tons of beautiful, sexy, sharp people that you would, at first blush, be able to visualize yourself being boy/girlfriended with, or married to. This is very painful if you have had great email and phone calls and both decided you really like each other. But the ones you like may tell you, right on the spot, that they are not attracted to you and the ones that want you strongly, you may not be attracted to. Prepare yourself and try to have no expectations, but don't deny that "chemistry" makes up to 25% of the first encounter and if there is no chemistry, it usually seems to fritter away rapidly"

“Most of the people will select one of the first few people they meet because they get overloaded after more people contact them. Most people, women more than men, get 30 to 200 responses and just get burned out after the first dozen meetings. The first people one meets tend to stick out in that persons mind more because the others start blending together in the density of increasing contacts, emails, phones calls and meetings. If you don’t meet soon you will often be buried in the confusion that follows as the increasing volume of email contacts builds up. Most of relationships on match turn out to be with one of the first few people one meets according to the survey. If people are trying to meet quickly, they are probably trying to get in to your “emotional window” before it closes.”

” Many of the people on there are just dabblers, or looky-loo’s who never intend to meet anybody in person, some of them are even marketing people for the dating service acting as “shills”. Ask them to meet soon to see if they are sincere.”

“People who object to long initial letters or emails are really not interested in knowing anything about the people they are contacting. They are often just looking for flings and distractions. If the people can’t deal with alot of information about you then they may not be interested in a long term relationship(LTR) and could just be using the dating system for personal validation and not for creating a relationship”

“Women tend to get 10 responses for every one response men get online.”

“Do not send more than a few emails or talk on the phone more than 45 minutes without meeting in person. The human mind will always create a bigger-than-life image of who you think you are talking to and it will be impossible for the other person to live up to that. You will set yourself up for disappointment and your experience here will always be unproductive. The longer you wait, the more likely you are to be disappointed because the vision and the real-world don't match.”

“Most people go in with the best of intentions...thinking that a great mind/intellect connection will make-up for any lacks in “chemistry”..but it has never turned out to be like that... everybody seems to, ultimately, let chemistry rule. Looks are not the whole driver but they are always a non-insignificant criteria.”

“Bad breath can totally kill a date. How many losers have I been out with that would have been OK except their breath made me ill. Take 4-5 “Breath Assure” tablets at least 30 minutes before the date and eat an Altoid or some mint a few minutes before the date. Eat a little something before the date because an empty stomach can cause bad breath. Brush your teeth. See your dentist and have your teeth professionally cleaned.”

“IF you are cute and you try to get off of the service they may not take you off very quickly because you are attracting eyeballs or customers for them, you can get many free months from the service if you work it right.”

“Don’t do internet dating unless you are prepared to meet people and you have from 6-10PM Free every night, 30-90 minutes a day to read and respond to emails and at least half your weekend free to meet a few people. I will not work for most people unless they make a commitment to the process, feel that getting a special person is the most important priority in their lives (Over work, money, material things, etc.)and really treat the effort like a job. Most people are completely surprised by how much work is involved in this kind of dating. Many people select one of the first few people they meet just to avoid the time-drain. But, when you meet the person that you want to be with, it makes it all worth it ten times over.”

“When you first notice something you don’t like about the person, don’t run away or write them off, you must remember that you are operating in a hyper-accelerated dating environment (Where else would you meet 20 guys in 60 days?), in the “normal world” you would be looking for all these checklist items or first a validating red-flag to write them off as a stalker/creep like you do here. The density of people can be daunting but don’t let it make you too clinical in your approach.”

“Most dating systems forward from an anonymous email to your personal email. Be sure and set your email system up so your emails pop up on your work desktop or on your home system to avoid coming home at night and finding a plethora of responses and replies that you don’t have time to give proper attention to. That is unfair to you and to the people that are interested.”

“I now want to meet as soon as possible because the “rejection intensity” seems to be less painful for both people if you have not gotten emotionally involved with lots of phone calls and emails beforehand. So it is important to meet as soon as possible to reduce the pain factor of the potential turndown. Of course, if both of you happen to be attracted, then you are done and you get a boyfriend or girlfriend.”

“Don’t ask a person if they like you on the date. It puts them on the spot and is too harsh to hear live and in person if they do not.”

“The marketing people at each of the bigger dating services will tell you that the demographics for the service are high-income, well educated, aggressive, driven business people. This can be both good and bad. The women tend to be more sexually aggressive and the guys tend to be busier”.

“Men lie more than women but they both lie. Men lie because they had bad upbringings, or they are insecure or they are afraid. Men only lie about one thing so it is actually a misnomer to say men lie. It is better to say “Men are Polyamorus”. Men don’t think they are doing anything wrong unless there has been a very loud and official wedding or girlfriend/boyfriend-stage in the relationship announcement. Men never think they are lying..they really don’t, they just think that the relationship isn’t happening. Men think that women are too slow and careful and always shopping for the right man so they always think women are not going to stick around and they always keep their options open until a women clearly commits. Women think that men move too fast so they wait for a slow one, but they rarely come. Both genders are wired different so it never really works out until one or the other lets their defenses down.”

“Don’t attack people who ask you for a picture and do have a picture ready to go. Having a digital picture ready to go is considered to be the number one “rule” of the web. Don’t go online to date unless you already have one on your hard drive or you will just be creating a terribly frustrating experience for people you contact and most of them will be upset that you don’t have a picture. The only difference in meeting people on the web or in person is that you have no visual context. Most people make their primary assessment based on appearance, even if they deny that they do, it is a natural human process to seek visual confirmation. On the same note, don’t judge a book by its cover. Many “pretty” people who seek only “pretty” people often find shallowness and vanity and no substance for that very

relationship they seek...try a normal looking person, you will usually be surprised."

"There are no weirdoes and no normal people on the internet. There aren't people at all, just words and text. You have to realize it is a digital environment and employ it as an initiation place and then follow-up in the real-world. The unique thing about open network communication is that it has no established social order or boundaries so people are naturally supported in their theatrical creation. The difficult aspect of this is that there is nobody to reference you as you microscopically grow bigger or into other tangents of a character without even noticing it. So; people tend to be more flexible with the facts or narrative because they feel like they are co-writing a novel with some one in real time."

"Can girls and guys be "just Friends. (Harry met Sally) Yes, if neither is physically attracted to the other. If one is and the other isn't it will almost never work. In the case of one person being attracted but wanted to be friends, many of those people will either be in denial or embarrassed to acknowledge their attraction."

"Realize that time doesn't exist on the internet. What is a timely response or an appropriate development of social expectations

will be too slow or too fast to the other person. Most internet socializing tends to move at “warp speed”...because it can.”

“Don’t discuss emotional issues in email. They will almost always be misinterpreted. Hence the smiley faces: ;-) :-) etc. Never have a fight or misunderstanding via email or you are done for. Context is not apparent in email.”

“Guys talk about sex 70% more than most women. It is genetic memory-burned into their brains. Many guys, though, use sex as emotional validation but they are incapable of admitting it, the rest are just horny. Society has programmed men to feel afraid to show sensitivity because it might make them look weak or gay.

If you talk about sex in email or on the phone, before you meet, and you both seem to be equally interested in it, it will probably, then, never happen because you did that. By building it up in advance you create a psychological fantasy which your mind will always make bigger than reality can possibly live up to. When you meet and find out that neither of you are the “Fabio” or “Miss America” (..fill in name of whoever floats your boat) of your assumptive projections then your boat is sunk.”

“Most people find the picture issue necessary but disconcerting. Many people’s friends tell them they are not photogenic and never look the same from shot to shot. Most people look better

in person than in a picture unless a modeling studio shot them. You can't really tell what a person looks like unless you have seen 5-6 different pictures in different settings."

"Many "socially-beautiful" men & women are conditioned to only go out with GQ/FratHouse looking people. These people have been taught that it is all about facial balance, symmetry and small featured proportion; the majority of the real world does not have that symmetry. Frat House/Sorority people are singled out by a culture and guided to ...Frat Houses and Sororities for reinforcement from common-culture types.! If only we could stop and look deeper than the shell..but those social imprints and media conditionings represent strong mnemonic triggers."

"Avoid the "Sherlock Holmes" technique. Many people feel that they have to squeeze as much information out and draw conclusions about that information in the first date. Don't make assumptions or second-guess others. If somebody responds to one question you ask with a lengthy answer about food, work, cars, etc; don't assume that they are obsessed with one or the other. They may just be a long-winded or detailed communicator or they may just feel obligated to try to give you as much info as possible about something you showed interest in. Try to adopt a flexible attitude in assessing a persons process based on one initial meeting."

“Cosmo advises that previous marriage should be an issue but the US census shows us that the Likelihood of new marriages ending in divorce is 50%. If your potential date has not been married, facts now show that they may have been smarter and more dedicated to a permanent relationship potential by waiting until after their 30’s. Others have just not met the right person and hold the ideal partner dream firm. Some have asked people to marry them but the other person said no. So, not being married after 30 does not mean, today, what it might have meant in your parents times.”

“I don’t have the answers.

This might be funny for you, or it might not. I found this card at a Hallmark display:

Bad Date #132:

He likes you. You don’t like him. He says he’ll call and does.

Bad Date #133:

You like him. He doesn’t like you. He says he’ll

call and doesn't.

Bad Date #134:

You like him. He likes Jim. He dresses better than you.

Bad Date #135:

He wears too much aftershave. He flirts more with the waitress than with you. But that's a good thing.

Bad Date #136:

He talks all night about his ex. Then he cries.

Bad Date #137:

You like him a lot. He likes you a lot. Then he changes his mind.

I've been on all of those, and then some. My friend

pointed out that the existence of that card means that it happens to loads of us. Somehow that thought should make us feel better, right?"

"Rule One: Sexual intercourse changes every rule. Nudity of one party or both parties can in some cases modify the rules.

Rule Two: Every rule has an exception or two or three.

Rule Three: The ambulance-chaser rule. There is an appropriate waiting period after someone breaks up before you can ask them out. I am unsure as to exactly what this waiting period is, but I know it is longer than five minutes and shorter than a month.

Rule Quatro: The rebound rule. Never, ever date people who are not over their last significant other. This is bad. You will be forced to listen to stories of love lost and told you can't go to Applebee's because he used to take her there.

Signs she is still holding a flame: She refers to his current girlfriend as the whore from KU, and she is mysteriously busy on weekends he is in town.

Rule Five: As Olympia Dukakis said in "Moonstruck," "Don't shit where you eat." Try your hardest not to date anyone you work with.

Teachers should not date students. Bartenders should not date servers. Checkers should not date baggers.

The only possible exception to this rule is if the individual you wish to date works in a different department or section of the organization than you. Even then, use extreme caution.

Rule Six: The I'll-call-you rule. Men seem to have a particularly hard time with this one.

Let's say after a night of conversation, a woman gives you her number and tells you to give her a call. It is appropriate to call the next day; you will not seem too anxious.

This first call should be a casual call, and you should include your name and the location of your first encounter so she can definitely identify you.

You may at the time of this first call express your intent to call again later in the week with plans for a date.

Rule Seven: The sisters, aunts, cousins and mothers of women you have dated are off-limits unless you live in Arkansas or certain counties in Mississippi.

Her best friend is a no-no, as well as the sisters, aunts, cousins and mothers of any of your friends.

The rule that is eight: The rule of who pays. The man.

To hell with women's liberation. If you are the man, and I am sure you know how to tell, you will be footing the bill unless otherwise arranged before the date. In same-sex relationships the person who asks for the date pays.

Ninth in the list of rules: Follow your heart. Rules are meant to be broken. We can't all be as lucky as ferrets, but if you bite

someone in just the right place you might get lucky. "

"Okay... think by now you get the point on my article. Guys and gals of all ages... I want to say that whomever you fall for, regardless if their dorky, popular, weird, smart, crazy, etc.. don't be pressured by the stereotypes of high school! Open your heart and be honest about your feelings. When one person breaks those "Rules of dating in high school", it can give everyone else the courage to break those silly dumb pathetic rules as well. I know it's even harder when you're getting pressure from your friends. Especially if you're honest and, for instance our one of the "popular guys" and then you say to your buddies that you like that little chubby girl in your Math class, and everyone is like, "Dude... you like HER?!" Then of course you turn bright red and deny it. But if they're true friends, then they'll back you on what you believe. Stereotypes are nasty evil things... and deep down... most of us don't believe them... and most of us wish we could go against them... but we're afraid. Therefore, I suggest we all work on it together.

Next time the dorky girl or guy, popular girl or guy, crazy girl or guy, etc... comes up to you, instead of jumping to conclusions about who they are based on what they've been "labeled" by the school, reach out your hand to them.... who knows, you might meet that Mr. or Mrs. Right of your dreams. And my last point.... don't try so hard to go searching for love when you're young. While there are the percentage of people that do meet in high school and get married, chances are, it doesn't work. You have your life ahead of you to meet that special person for you. Enjoy high school and meet friends of all social cliques, and don't concentrate so much on whether or not someone is going to accept you or not accept you. Just be yourself."

"? Cowboys. Though I have nothing against cowboys per se; I just don't want to date one. I'd even venture to bet that line dancing is a joyful activity, good exercise even, but again, not for me.

? Seatbelts. I admire a man who uses a seatbelt. It says a lot about him. Like the fact that he enjoys his life and wants it to continue.

? Transportation. I admire a man who actually has a car. Having to pick a guy up is a little fishy. Due to the complete dearth of mass transportation in Brainerd, it can often mean there's been some trouble with the law.

? Glasses. I'm quite particular about the issue of glasses. Small and the right shape work well for me, but if they go anywhere near a square and over three to four inches tall, my enthusiasm dwindles. (I'm quite aware of how shallow I'm sounding. Really, I'm a decent sort. Large, square glasses are fine for my uncle or my grandpa or the grocer, but in terms of a potential mate, they're not my ideal.)

? Smells matter. As it turns out, metallic licorice types of smells do not appeal to me. Neither do excessively manly colognes. Clean, soapy scents or woody, incensy campfire types of smells do appeal to me.

? Shoes. Again, I realize I'm showing the shallow side of myself here, but cowboy boots that make a man appear to be teetering on high heels don't do it for me. Solid loafers that don't make clicking noises on the floor work nicely. I'm OK with certain types of sandals. And outdoorsy boot-shoes work for me big time. Call me crazy.

? Hair. This is a very precise category. Feel free to take notes if you must. A man who spends a lot of time on his hair does not appeal to me. My motto is hair can be gorgeous without lots of work. (Motto may be a bit strong, but the thought has crossed my mind.)

While I'm not sure gorgeous is an adjective that can be used to describe my hair; at least I don't end up spending inordinate amounts of time in front of the mirror, cursing and wracked with self-doubt. I can get my cursing and self-beratement done in about five minutes.

Any man who spends more time than it takes to watch an episode of Boy Meets World, back combing, teasing or adding products of a fruity nature to his hair turns me off.

Not unlike the issue of glasses, the hair should not be more than three or four inches in height.

Next issue: Lack of hair. This works. Only if the hair that does exist is not used to overcompensate for the lack of. This shows a certain self-confidence. I also have found that long hair is not my favorite. It should, however, be all one length. Layers or bilateral "hockey" cuts — short on the top and sides but long in the back — do nothing for me. Actually, they make me want to run to the nearest restroom labeled "does" or "bucks."

? Height. This category is a freebie. I'm only 5 feet 1, so while I might be uncomfortable with a man less than my height; statistically that does not occur very often. Other than that, I'm pretty open.

? Weight. Actually, I'm pretty flexible on this too. Mostly because I'm no Ally McBeal. Not only am I not Ally McBeal, but sometimes I have seething anger about how Ally McBeal (i.e. the media's representation of the ideal bulimic woman) can make me feel like the body I live in is wrong.

OK, so I guess Ally McBeal can't actually make me feel that way, but there's definitely a link of some sort. So, in hopes that I will not be judged as harshly as I sometimes feel, I am pretty open about size. I like men who are active yet are not obsessed with fitness or the size of their "pythons." It is for this convoluted, irrational rationalization that weight is not an issue with me.

? Questions. I need someone who asks them and then listens to the answers. Go figure. This in turn makes me want to ask questions and have real conversations. A definite necessity.

? Touching. Too much touching right away is confusing and not so good. No touching whatsoever is also confusing. No real verdict on this one.

? Reading. Let's just say this is a good thing. And no, I do not consider porn actual reading.

? Age. So far, I've been dating men older than me. Some much older. Telling someone your real age is good. Hedging and answers like "I believe you're as young as you feel" are not good signs.

? Humor. As it turns out, this one of the biggest pluses by far. By humor, I don't really mean jokes. Stand-up comedian wannabes who consider one person a way to try out new material do not

appeal to me. But a wry skepticism of the world at large is rather quite nice”

“Rules of Dating (for College)

1. In an imaginary world a kiss would signify the end of sexual tension and the beginning of a relationship. In college, it means somebody’s horny.
2. In an imaginary world, “I really like spending time with you” and “you’re cool” mean I REALLY like spending time with you and you ARE cool. In college, it means “will you fuck me?”
3. In an imaginary world, holding hands is the first sign of true love, in college it means someone is too drunk to stand on their own.
4. In an imaginary world the guy buys dinner and a movie and kisses you goodnight at your front door. In college, there is no such thing as a dinner and a movie and at the end of a date, most guys want a hell of lot more than a kiss goodnight.
5. In an imaginary world, men aren’t afraid to admit their feelings. In college, if you ask them what they want or why they kissed you they respond, “Why do you think?” Refer to number one for definition.
6. In an imaginary world, sleepovers are sleepovers. Just that. In college it’s a fuckfest or pretty close to it.
7. In an imaginary world the guy might call you the day after. In college, you’re lucky if he acknowledges your presence when you walk by. Or if they do call back, refer to number one again, for the reason.

8. In an imaginary world even gorgeous guys are nice. In college, cute guys are asses, unattractive men are desperate, and nice guys finish last.

9. In an imaginary world, sex is sacred and special. In college, it happens every night between drunk strangers, who don't even know each others names.

10. In an imaginary world, men have only one girl, chickie, babe, woman. In college, you are the only one, except for, Jodi, Jean, Alisha, Sara, Laura, Liz, Christy, Carrie, Jen, Mary, Katie, Jeff, Gretchen, Andi...

Why are these important if you aren't in college? Because college behavior almost never ends after college!!!"

AND HERE IS WHAT THE GUYS HAVE SAID:

"I would like to see a process which goes:

1. Meet casual friends in normal life. This doesn't work easily for people

who have non-perpetuating social contact circles, or who have restrictions

on dating people at work or don't attend social functions where there is a

substantial population of single people of a reasonable age group. Thus

match.com, which is not normal life, but will have to do in a pinch.

2. Develop a devoted friendship, where you can get comfortable with someone

without wondering whether each time is the last time you'll ever see them.

3. Become lovers. Do a great romantic weekend somewhere to start this off.

4. Get married. Or some derivation of this until both of you are ready.

5. Have a family. Optional according to taste.

One can stop anywhere along the above continuum with great happiness, if you

haven't skipped steps. If you've skipped any steps, you'll hate each other

and yourself (you can demonstrate this by trying steps 5 through 1 in

reverse)."

"I never met so many goldiggers and gals with superficial checklists in my life.. yikes.. you've got to be careful."

"The bottom line is make genuine contact at all costs. If you connect on a genuine level, you have the ball. Shake it up and have fun. Everyone is bored and sick of the bullshit. An honest moment of connection is refreshing"

"There's plenty to go around. If you hog the ball, the team loses. Your friends are not your adversaries. Work together and everyone wins. Petty competition makes everyone look bad. Worst of all, you look desperate or bitter. everyone likes fun. Keep it fun. It's fun to share."

"People like to fill in the blanks. People also want things to be perfect. Keep your mouth shut and they'll fill in the blanks perfectly. Don't try to guess what they're looking for. It's not about what you say, it's how you listen."

"Women are smart. Take this into consideration. They're good at reading the vibe and are in tune with what's really going down. They know what's happening. Don't manipulate, deny, and condescend. It's insulting."

Women like attention. It's flattering as long as you're respectful and honest. Formalities

“Be honest with yourself and with them. If you want intimacy, then own up to it. Don’t come at them like you’re interested in their nail polish if what you really want is intimacy. It’s insulting. You’re a man, she’s a woman. Deal with it. The more you pretend that it’s not about sexual attraction, the harder it will be to redefine the parameters. Honesty works like magic if you’re free from guilt. The truth shall set you free.”

“Lying is bad. Forget the ethical issue, it’s bad business. It demonstrates a lack of self-confidence. Even if you get away with it, you’re going down the wrong road.

But if a friend gets in trouble, sometimes a simple lie can be a perfect parachute.”

“You’re a man, so present yourself as one. Confidence and being comfortable with one’s self is very attractive. So if you’re attracted to a beautiful baby, be both confident and comfortable with that. Don’t apologize or qualify how you’re feeling. She’ll respect you for it.”

“There’s nothing like a good entrance. You wouldn’t want to sit at a table that wasn’t set. If you’re there too early, you look desperate. Show up late like you’re “just stopping by,” and you come off like the man about town.”

“Everyone wants a mystery. Staring deadpan at a beautiful baby cheats her out of the suspense and courtship she deserves. Keep

it intriguing and give her the gift of a challenge.”

“The strongest will survive. Don’t waste your time filling your head with self-doubt. The competition’s fierce, so always give yourself the edge. A sense of self-respect makes all the difference in the world. You can be the king of the Jungle or just another hyena cowering at the water hole. It’s all up to you.”

“Don’t hide the fact that you like sex. That doesn’t mean act like the fourteen year old on the back of the bus who’s constantly pulling on himself and making obscene noises. It just means own your sexuality and don’t apologize for it.”

“Be a man with a slow hand. The ladies love foreplay, and that’s exactly why you wait a few days before you call. No reason to rush it. Let her savor the wait. She’ll thank you later.”

“Our generation is the first to be presented with the challenge of the answering machine. A good message can put you on the fast track to paradise, a bad one can lead to public ridicule and endless playbacks to the delight of family and friends. The stakes are high. This is no joke.

The golden rule is keep it simple. Don’t try to overexplain who you are or how you’re feeling. It’s a moment frozen in amber. It’s

a small piece of your soul. Give her a taste—the little pink spoon, not the whole sundae.”

“Sometimes it just happens. Let it. Don’t let stupid rules from a book get in the way. If you’re lucky enough to have things unfold organically, don’t ruin it. You’re money.”

“You’re always better off trusting yourself and playing your game. You wouldn’t ask Stockton to bang the boards for rebounds and you wouldn’t want Shaq trying to drain threes. Stick with what feels right. That way, even if you fail, you’ve learned something. Trust your instincts and think for yourself. ”

“ The first date is always in a public place, you take your car, they take their car, both of you leave in your cars and go back to your own homes. The second date is exactly as the first. Exactly as the second. The fourth date can be in one car, mutually agreeable that each of you will return to their respective homes alone. There is to be no touching as far as long kisses, arms around each other, longer than a few seconds hugging. At no time are the two of you to be alone together. Any vehicle causes a chance for being alone. When you arrive home, get out of the car and go inside. There is nothing wrong with being walked to your door. However, talking outside is fine, you enter your home alone. It is my suggestion that you date for the minimum of one year. If there are children from previous marriages or relationships, they are not to meet your date for the first year.

This causes damage to the children; as they will see people going in and out of your life that they become attached to. Remember, being without their father or mother is already traumatic enough.

Sex before marriage is absolutely out. Many times I have heard people talk about their "friends." I ask them if they are sleeping with them, and they say yes. I tell them they are no longer friends. Remember, you don't sleep with your friends! Any time alone together is dangerous. Inappropriate kissing, fondling, *etc.* will only lead to hormone adjustments and crossing the line is much easier to do in the heat of the moment. Don't set yourself up to fail.

If you are a single parent with children, just because you had sex at least once in your life, doesn't mean it is all right to have it again. Become a born again virgin.

Avoid conversations that are sexual in nature. Using the "someday" technique may put you in the present moment faster than you think. If you cannot stand someone's children, don't marry that person. You will resent the children later and the relationship will fail. Practice makes perfect. Continue practicing friendship. You will need this later in your relationship."

"Rule #1 HOW WELL YOU ENJOY THIS GAME = HOW WELL YOU MASTER THE RULES.

It is up to you to learn the rules. Ignorance of the rules will not protect you from the consequences of breaking them.

RULE #2:

HOW WELL YOU ENJOY THIS GAME IS BASED ON THE PURPOSE YOU GIVE IT.

For example, if your purpose is to have fun, to learn about yourself and others, and to develop your social skills, then you can enjoy any given date. (Dating is a great opportunity for learning about you and others, if you so choose). On the other hand, if your purpose is to meet your "soul-mate" (whatever that is)-who will magically and instantly turn your unhappy life into a happy one-then it is virtually certain you will not enjoy any given date, nor the game itself.

RULE #3:

GET A LIFE! (if you don't have one already...)

This means: define and pursue your own interests-and consider building non-romantic relationships with a variety of people, including couples. Dating requires that you invite another person into your life. If you don't have one, you are unlikely to attract someone you would want as a mate, since we tend to attract people who are at a similar "level" as we are. By the way, there is a "rule of life" at work here, which some people don't like: YOU alone are responsible for your happiness; no one else can 'make' you happy. So make your life full and happy!

RULE #4:

MAKE AN ABSOLUTE COMMITMENT TO LOVE YOURSELF-EVEN IF YOU THINK YOU CAN'T OR DON'T KNOW HOW.

A successful relationship is built on three cornerstones: communication, caring, and commitment. And there is no way you can give these to another if you withhold them from yourself. Consider using this affirmation daily: "I AM MY OWN BEST FRIEND AND STRONGEST SUPPORTER; I LOVE AND APPRECIATE WHO I AM!" A powerful "stand," such as this, will support you in practicing Rule #5. Also, being more loving to others will increase your self-love. Plus you'll be much more attractive as a person. **

RULE #5:

GET A HANDLE ON YOUR SELF-TALK!

Your enjoyment of the dating game-or any activity-is related to your self-talk. Most people disempower themselves, at times mercilessly, with negative evaluations of themselves and others. Learn to observe your "internal dialogue" with detachment, like images on a movie screen, and not react to it. (Meditation is very helpful for cultivating this ability). *** Especially, don't take rejection personally: "chemistry" has nothing to do with who you are!

RULE #6:

CHOOSE A COMPANION

-not a friend or love interest: that comes later.. (A companion may be defined as a person with whom you share activities, where the activity is more important than the particular person).

Pick three (3) people you'd like to get to know better. (If you don't know three such people, go back to Rule #3). Select an activity that you enjoy. Then pick the one person you think you would have the most fun being with, and invite them to share that activity with you.

RULE #7:

EASE UP ON YOUR EXPECTATIONS!

Don't expect your first date with anyone to be "the one." A loving, committed partnership requires, in addition to "chemistry," shared values and life-style preferences, compatible goals, complementary personalities, and similar expectations of (and capacity to nourish) a relationship. So, plan to meet and go out with lots of people, until you find a real "match." Meanwhile, if you relax and allow things to just unfold, you'll be able to enjoy and get to know your date. And your date will relax, without feeling "sized up." You can discover other kinds of valuable relationships if you're not just focused on romance. And, men, you need to know that "friends" can become "lovers" if you're patient, respectful and loving: a true friend!

RULE #8:

KEEP IT LIGHT:

Don't tell intimate, personal secrets on the first (or second) date! Healthy people know how to protect themselves, and you do this by keeping your sharing to the public level: this means it would be OK for anyone to know this about you. Be genuinely interested in your date, and ask them questions about their life-their interests, work, friends and family, hobbies and preferred

fun activities, *etc.* The more interested you are in them, the more interested they'll be in you (if not, you have a red flag!). Also, it's critical to balance showing interest in the other person and making room for them to show interest in you: if you're always pursuing, it's likely your partner will retreat!

RULE #9:

YOU DECIDE: IS THIS PERSON A FRIEND?

If you determine that you have enough in common, after the first date, and you enjoy one another's company, then it's time to ask yourself this question. At the friendship level, the person is more important than the activity. Here, communication is very important, and you need to be able to recognize and move between levels of sharing. See if you can begin to share at the private level (personal thoughts and feelings you wouldn't want publicly known), and at the intimate level (thoughts and feelings about the other person)-and notice their response: is it accepting or judging (or aloof)? It is useful to imagine four levels of depth in sharing, and to go no more than one level deeper than your partner does. Also, don't confuse private and intimate sharing: e.g., giving details about how you were abused as a child is not a turn-on!

JUST SAY "WHOA" TO SEX!

If you feel comfortable, safe and mutually attracted with your new friend, then it may be appropriate to explore sexuality... (healthy relationships are based mainly on comfort; unhealthy relationships are based mainly on intensity). WATCH OUT HERE! You need to be rigorously honest with yourself: if you're starving for contact, it's very easy to think you see a friend on a first date.

But the reality is that they're a stranger, and having sex with a stranger is dangerous!

It is critical to know what sex means to your partner: don't assume anything, ask them. You also need to respect and admire each other as people: you simply can't build a satisfying relationship without these two qualities. Chemistry is important, but it can distort your thinking. Sexual feelings stimulate a myriad of chemicals in the body, which are proven to alter perception like drugs. So exceptional care and consciousness are called for! If you have a history of 'crash and burn' relationships, it's a good idea to get feedback from your friends, before you jump in"

"If you examine it closely, your situation makes a great deal of sense. Men in their twenties have a very different set of priorities than men in their thirties or forties and "seasoned" men are often more mature. The nice thing is, in this case, you and your friends are the beneficiaries.

Twenty-something year old men are still searching for who they are, what talents they possess and the type of women they desire. They are experiencing many aspects of life for the first time. Physically, they are approaching their sexual prime and seek physical relationships more often. Sex, money, personal-improvement, material possessions, sports and status are their primary interests and motivational forces. Their 'me' mentality has not yet matured into a "we" philosophy and jealousy often surfaces seemingly without provocation.

For older men, this is not the case. By their late thirties, most know who they are or at least who they are not. Many are in the second or third phases of their careers and have learned that there is more to life than money, sex and prestige. You will find that they avoid playing the “mind games’ that younger men engage in as they realize this is simply a waste of time. They have learned what physically, emotionally and intellectually satisfies a woman. Seasoned men will be more responsible, get things done and have a life beyond their relationship with you. They will not hang on your every word, nor pressure you for sex, but will truly appreciate the time they spend with you. They realize that in today’s busy and complicated world, time is precious.

Women assume very different roles in the lives of men depending on the age of the man they are dating. Younger men see women as being there for them. Older men take great personal pride in dating younger women and strive to connect with them on their level.

Women indicated that time spent with older men was more meaningful, loving, and enjoyable. They had the ability to hold women’s attention, had more life experiences to draw upon and focused less on themselves. “

"If a guy breaks up with his girlfriend, and goes out with another girl within ten to twenty years, he is a "jerk" and "dumped her for someone else."

On the other hand, if the girl goes out with somebody mere seconds after she broke up with her ex, its not being mean or shallow, its because her ex is a shallow insensitive jerk who beat her.

If a guy dumps a girl, he did it because he is a "selfish pig" that "cares about nobody but himself." But, on the other hand, if a girl dumps a guy, she was "doing what's best for both of us" because its "not you, its me."

No matter how persuasive his argument or how much he explains why he broke up with a girl, that girl, her family, and friends, will always somehow "find out the real reason" or "just make something up so the girl doesn't look bad."

If guys act senselessly or stupid, its because they're "jerks" or "assholes" or "selfish pigs that don't care about other people's feelings."

If a girl acts senselessly or stupid, its either because:

A) Its the guy's fault

B) Its that time of the month (even though they've been acting like it for 3 weeks) and/or they're having "personal problems"

C) They weren't acting senselessly or stupid, you just think that, but you're wrong.

Girls are all heart and don't care about material, one-dimensional things like those "damned male pigs" do. That's why they have hundreds of pairs of shoes and will only love you if you buy them unbelievably expensive jewelry that has no real purpose or function other than to drain you of what small funds you have."

"Well, okay. It's not exactly the rules. After all, we're talking about something being written by a fellow whose romantic career has been... less than exemplary, shall we say? But, it's bits and bobs I've come up with, especially in talking things over with friends recently due to once again getting interested in someone and having it not immediately turn into utter bliss.

1: Get a Life

Ah, how many times have we heard this shouted at some poor anorak (harmless obsessive) who just can't seem to let go of their pet addiction? Most of us feel contempt-tinged pity for the poor fools who seem oblivious to anything but collecting stamps, or trainspotting, or studying fourteenth-century medieval warfare - and yet sign right on up to the Sad Bastard of the Month Club when it comes to love, complete with the free boxed set of 'Bad Poetry No One Should Write' and '101 Ways to Say "I'm a Sap"'. When you have Romeo and Juliet as a cultural icon of romance, the phrase 'Get a Life' seems rather trite.

Still, this is perhaps the most important advice anyone can take. No matter how interested in someone you are, you can't just dive on in, making them the end-all be-all of each and every day. After all, you need something to talk about, right? Doesn't happen if you spend all your time together. You have to have things that happen in your life that you can discuss and relate to each other.

It also lets off steam. What use is it to love someone else's company if you don't know what missing that company is like? And no two people, no matter how compatible or alike they are, like all of the exact same things in the exact same proportions. Or do you *really* think that she enjoys playing Tekken for several hours each night?

Also, in a sad, manipulative way, it shows that you aren't desperate. The fact you have outside interests, outside things to do, shows that you can get on perfectly well without the other

person - you just prefer not to. It's that old, well-used argument of want versus need. It's much, much better - and I know this from experience - to be wanted, rather than needed. Wanted is a choice, one that doesn't come loaded with requirements and expectations of action. Being needed has a great deal to it in terms of things you have to do for the other person, because they can't provide it themselves or can't do without it.

This also allows for the Consolation Prize category. Should things not end up happening or working out, the fact that you kept up your previous life - and hopefully didn't talk everyone's ears off about your relationship - means that you actually have people you can do things with in the future. Most people don't like being abandoned every time you decide to chase a woman (in my case) or a man - it shows a lack of balance. And, after all, we all know that one of the best ways to meet new people is through your friends...

2: Take it Easy

This is my personal bugaboo. I am not a patient man when it comes to romantic relationships. If the way I tend to handle relationships was compared to highway driving, I'm the fellow that your local law enforcement would always be pulling over for thinking that the accelerator in the car is an on-off switch - either not in use or fully pressed to the floor. Lead foot. Speed demon. Michael Schumacher doesn't hold a candle. *Etc.*

But, no matter how much you think you can break into the Formula 1 race of dating, pushing things at maximum speed isn't the way to go. Most meaningful relationships aren't going to start with racing ahead to the formal aspects of a relationship without getting to know one another. I shudder to consider people who go home with each other from the club without knowing anything about the other person's personality, likes, dislikes, personal phobias, or even what they prefer for breakfast. If nothing else, relationships should require the same cooling-off period as purchasing a gun in most states in the United States. Sure, it seems a good idea when you're hot and bothered... but do you really know what you're getting into?

I tend to dwell on things in my mind, build them up into gigantic proportion, and then melt down into a little ball in no time. It's probably because I'm a relatively repressed individual, not used to any large swings of emotion one way or another (any disputes with this statement can be given to me. Directly. And I'll bludgeon you until you agree with me). This is Not Good, with capitals. Why, you ask?

Because it labels you as an obsessive. Obsessives are bad. Obsessives cannot react rationally to emotional matters. Obsessives can hurt people, either emotionally or physically. They can become like one fellow, who's been contacting my cousin on a semi-regular basis for several years after she refused to have anything to do with him. Yes, I know, you look at the movies, and think it looks cute. Think again - most places now have laws against that sort of activity, and if you're remotely decent, becoming one of these poor souls is one of the most truly mortifying experiences you can have. Talk about shattering the self-image.

Think of it like cooking. If I'm baking up a batch of my 'dive bombs' (double chocolate chunk cookies, yum!), the only result of cooking them at gas mark 9 will be small charred bits of chocolate dough only good for a Palestinian to throw at Israeli soldiers. However, if I cook them at gas mark 5 for the right amount of time, I have confections suitable for use in bribing large numbers of friends and relatives. Now, I don't know about you - but until I join the intifada, I'll stick with the lower temperature.

If you don't overpressurize and overcook the situation, your relationship, potential or in place, will have time to grow and flower. Nothing happens in a vacuum, and nothing happens in an instant. Let it grow, let it develop. Get to know the person, and let them get to know you. After all, they have just as much of a right to see what they're getting as you do to see what you are trying to catch. That process also allows you two to see that you are both interested in each other for each other, and aren't some sort of raving maniac.

How to deal with this one? Don't expect immediate results. Indulge liberally in Rule Number 1 - Get A Life. Not too much - you do want to show you're still interested. But do other things. Don't hover over her, being there all the time, no matter what the time. Do other things. Put other parts of your life forward as being important, and do them - even if that can put you out of doing some of the things you could otherwise be doing with her. Allow some time to lapse between seeing each other - a day or a few can really bring home how much you wish you were seeing each other. As opposed to you both wishing you were not seeing each other, and won't they please just go away!

3. Be Sincere

We all know Cary Grant. Suave on screen, the man exuded charm. Hair always perfectly in place, clothes always perfectly tailored unless he's been diving through some cornfield in the middle of Illinois. He knew the right drink to have - and to order for the lady, too. Never a fashion faux pas, always the master at being the best example of sophistication you could imagine. This man could charm the ladies left, right, and centre, with the right compliment, the right gallantry, the right whispered phrase.

Now, look in the mirror. Does that look like Cary Grant? I hate to be the one to break it to you, bub...

In the real world, that doesn't work. Well, yes. It can. But it shouldn't. More importantly, if you're reading this, it isn't likely to work *for you*. You are more likely to come off sounding like some Turkish rug dealer from a B movie from the forties, slimy, lewd, and frankly somewhere farther down on the evolutionary scale than your everyday common garden slug. How's that for a comparison?

There is a certain art to seduction involving complimenting a woman in such a way that most women these days recognise all too well and want no part of. It's often erroneously attributed to Mediterranean men, though I've seen Germans, English, and Americans try it too. It takes a certain knack, a certain arrogance, and in my opinion, a certain contempt for women to try it. I don't think I'd *want* the type of woman who would go for it.

Now, I'm offbeat, often disconnected mentally, and awkward at the best of times. While that sounds bad, it's also my charm, so

we go with what we have. And that, my friends, is the exact point I'm making. Women are just as quirky, if not more so, than men. But what they prize is getting to know your quirks. Honestly is immensely flattering. Telling someone they look beautiful because you happen to think they do, rather than as some pickup line, does amazing things for your standing in their eyes. Being who you are, and trusting them enough *to be who you are* is just as flattering.

This doesn't mean you have to sit around grouching about the last sporting match you happen to see and scratching itchy parts of your anatomy. That's not honest either. What is needed is to show how you honestly feel. If you are interested in them, what they have to say is important - so show you're listening. Respond to what they have to say - if they've any respect for you, they'll listen when you in return have something to expand on, or take a position opposite to whatever they're saying. Even if you agree, nodding to show that, or saying something to that effect shows that you heard what they have to say, and that it actually got processed by that grey goo called a brain that resides between your ears.

Want to know something? Ask a question. Just make sure you listen to the answer. Don't like something they're doing? Tell them - politely. Feel a certain way? Tell them, but in a respectful fashion. You will be amazed what credit it does for you to be able to sit down, without some massive emotional hyperbole but with intense, deep sincerity and meaning, and tell someone that you are interested in them as more than a friend and wish to know how they feel about you. Don't declare your undying love, don't wail about how you can't live without them - because, let's face it... you can. Or else you're in that obsessive category we

discussed above, and therefore don't deserve them. What you are doing is letting them know precisely where you stand - no hyperbole, no exaggeration, no untruths. Provided you've picked a good one, they'll give you the same back in spades.

4. Know when to back off.

Ever Star Wars? I'm sure you know the scene - the Rebels are attacking the Death Star, and Gold Group is making its trench run in their spiffy little Y-wings to hit that exhaust port, while Luke and the rest of the X-wings are chopping their way through the TIE fighters above. Remember the radio traffic for that scene? Let me paraphrase:

Gold Leader: I can't get a shot

Wingman: Stay on target...

Gold Leader: I can't manoeuvre!

Wingman: Stay on target...

Gold Leader: You're too close!

Wingman: Stay on target...

Gold Leader: Loosen up!

Wingman: Stay on target...

Meanwhile, dear old Gold Leader is doing his best to imitate the nine o'clock fireworks show at any Disney amusement theme park you can name. Pull this stunt, and your intended love

interest will likely blow up - but you'll be the one to get incinerated.

This is probably the hardest part for most people. No one likes being helpless, or waiting for someone else to make a decision. We all want to just say that one thing more that will cause the clouds to part, the sun to shine, and everything to be all right. Surely, there's just that one phrase we're just about to find that will convince them that we are The One, that everything will be All Right, and that they can indeed find happiness and contentment in your arms...

Hate to tell you, but the road to hell - or the exhaust port on the Death Star, depending on how much your life is wrapped up in LucasFilms - is paved with exactly those sorts of good intentions. You can be doing wonderfully to convince someone of the rightness of your cause, but belabour the issue so much you end up annoying them to the point where you put yourself right out of contention. More is not better. More is just... more.

I'm not saying you should back off from everything. Anything but. If you have an objection to something, make it - otherwise you're just a sap. If you have a point to make - make it. But do not, under any circumstances, just keep nattering on. That shows a disrespect for your intended, as she will see it as you not believing you heard her, and that you think she can be convinced simply by sounding like a broken record player.

Take for instance one of those hypothetical situations when you've broached the possibility of a relationship with her. She's interested, but lists off a few reasons as to why now is not a good time - and why it may never happen. Contrary to some people's beliefs, you are allowed to register objections to these

reasons. However, you have to do so in a specific way. You can answer these points cogently - make your response to the point. Make it reasoned, without whining, yelling, or other such cheap emotional ploys, and actually address the points they bring up. Make your point while fully accepting their reason as valid - do not blow it off as specious. After all, they are convincing *to her*. Telling her in not so many words that she can't reason her way out of a paper bag is not a good start to a relationship! Finally, make your points only once. There is likely never going to be a conversation where she is listening more intently to you than in those moments - so make them count.

Bringing it up again at another time does you no good. You are not, as much as it would seem you are, trying to convince her at the time to date you. It's unlikely to happen. The idea of dating someone is, obviously, an emotional one, and emotions don't tend to change just by snapping the fingers. She will need time to mull over what you have to say, to mull over her feelings and how things have been changing between you lately, and mull over what changes in her life this will bring. It may take hours. If so, count yourself lucky. It may take days. It may take weeks. Or months. Or even years - though by that point it's likely moot. But it *will* take time, and you need to be patient with it. Pushing it will only label you as obsessive, or obnoxious, or as a cretin. Or all three.

An addendum to this. Don't push your friends too much. Yes, talk to them about the matter - but try to keep it to when you need to. Otherwise they won't be nearly as willing to listen to you after several sessions of playing the Boy who cried Wolf. Even if they are still willing to listen, they won't be in a position to give you nearly as good advice, much as a soldier who's been on watch

for several hours is not nearly as effective as one who's just taken up his post.

5. Enjoy it As it Comes (Or, Don't Write The Script)

I once had a girlfriend who would begin the most blazing arguments with me over what seemed to be the oddest things. Say a special event in our mutual lives had come up. I'd perhaps get her flowers, and then take her to dinner. The night would seem fine, but she'd get more and more angry, no matter how witty or charming I might be, no matter how good the food was, or anything else I could do. Then, later, when it was much, much too late, I'd find out what my sin was.

Simply put, I'd not followed the script.

In nearly all of these cases, my fault was not what I had done, or even having forgotten to do something I'd promised to do. It was for having not somehow read her mind and done what she had imagined the night would be like, and I would do. I'd have gotten her roses, instead of Irises, or picked the wrong restaurant, or not greeted her in the exact way she liked. Every time, her Rudolph Valentino would muff his lines, and turn out to simply be me, played in a special performance by me, and with Warner Brothers absolutely refusing to negotiate a change of actors for the current film.

This is a warning about expectations. Simply put, the more you have, the more likely you are to be disappointed in a big way. Having reasonable ones is fine - being surprised at being treated politely by another human being is standard, and showing such surprise makes people wonder about your home life. But

making expectations about how someone will react to your romantic advances is a great way to get yourself in trouble.

Expecting the girl to swoon at your feet the instant you even hint at liking her is ludicrous. If they do, I'd check your wallet.

Moreover, expecting such a reaction will set you up for one large emotional fall. Building up this amazingly rosy picture in your mind is like creating any complex piece of art - getting it shattered hurts like hell. The point of expressing your interest in a relationship is to demonstrate your willingness to invest in them as a person. If you've invested in some fanciful creation of your mind, you are missing the point.

Thinking too optimistically in that way is bad - it can even make you arrogant. But don't write the script as a failure, either. That creation can affect how you go into the conversation - so if you think she's just going to turn you down, she likely will if you let yourself act like it's a foregone conclusion. Part of showing that interest and having that conversation is that you are confident enough in yourself as a partner that it is actually a decision that she needs to make, as opposed to being an obligation on her time by asking her a question that you yourself have already decided is a 'no'.

In short, don't freight the possibilities with too much emotion. Consider it a mystery in life that you wish, out of sincere curiosity, to have answered. I am interested, therefore I want to know if you are interested. Don't turn it into an arrogant request for a rubber-stamping of your decision that you two are in a relationship, and don't turn it into her having to console you for being inadequate as a human being. Make it straightforward, make it respectful, make it from one equal to another. After all,

we are talking about romantic relationships, which should be about two equals dealing with one another. If you had something else in mind, you're reading the wrong piece of work.

The key to this whole wonderful world is enjoying what comes of it. If you are trying for a true relationship with this person, you should be enjoying her company as a friend as much as you would enjoy her company as a partner. So enjoy it! Take the time of getting to know her as a person and as a friend and make the most of it, enjoying it all the while. If you can't enjoy her company in a situation where you're not in the midst of full-blown loving, you have serious problems that have to be worked out, fast. If you can't let go of control enough to account for anything that comes up... then you shouldn't be asking to share your life and control thereof with someone else - anyone else.

6. Allow for the Sequel

... and don't do it in order to make another 100 million dollars at the box office. I don't care how much you enjoyed the wire work in *The Matrix*, the horror films of the eighties and the umpteen 'Rocky' movies should have convinced everyone that sequels merely for form's sake or for another buck are just wrong. Mel Brooks was spot-on with his line in *Spaceballs*: "And hopefully we'll meet again in *Spaceballs 2: The Search For More Money*."

No matter how dire the film industry is in rehashing good movies into dog food and tossing them back into the cinema-viewer's trough, there is a glimmering of a good idea in this. Simply put, when you ask your interest if she is interested in a relationship, you need to make sure that there is actually able to be the follow-on period after the question.

Let me put it another way: you do not live in an sit-com where the screen will fade to black with a laugh track going when you find your way to inform her that you want a relationship. You'll still be there, right in the middle of thing, as will she. No 'cut!', no pause button - and no rewind and no edit. However much you may be cringing inside and desperately wishing to rewind your life just a few precious seconds.

This is the part where you consider the short-term, medium-term, and long-term consequences. Love is great, as is the thought of it - but have you actually thought, or are you caught up in that rosy glow that usually involves fanciful creatures such as pink elephants running by at the edge of your peripheral vision? Much as I enjoy Fantasia - the old version - I wouldn't

want to live in the movie. If you haven't stopped to consider things rationally, it's time to start.

First, the short term. Are you asking her in a way that's not going to leave one or the other of you so embarrassed or angry that a 'yes' is not a possibility? However nice the emotion is, sending it over via a stripper is not likely to win you any points. Nor is taking more time than the current session of Parliament to get your speech out - Jimmy Stewart didn't look so hot by the end of 'Mr. Smith Goes To Washington', and there's good reason why. Each person is different, so you have to make the pitch appropriate to the person who it is aimed at. Some people find gallantry wonderful, while others wretch and look for the gong to bang to get you pulled offstage. It's the same for any sort of approach.

Similarly, pay attention to where and when you do it. The situation is just as important as the general state of your current friendship with the person. Asking a gal on a date while the other guy is on his knee proposing to her is usually considered bad. In all honesty, though, think about it - if you've been fighting all day over something or other, it's not usually a good time. In general, if it will merely add stress to the person's life rather than being something positive, don't bring it up. There are better times, and you are needed more as a friend than as someone trying to change the current situation - which requires them to be strong.

Know when to end the conversation. This has been covered earlier, but is important to know. If she says yes, well, no worries. But if you get a qualified statement or a no, you need to make it possible for a graceful exit with no one being hurt. Don't just

stammer something out and high-tail it out - that's rude. Be adult about it, let conversation go elsewhere or just drop if that's where it happens. Say goodbye when you go - show that you have no hard feelings. This is immensely important. Just because they can't always take you up on your offer doesn't mean they are personally insulting you. It just means they aren't taking you up on your offer. *Nothing more.*

Now the medium-term. This is the next few weeks or even months. Again, a 'yes' is easy to deal with - you have the relationship and go on with life. If it's qualified, you have to figure out that balance.

Do you wish to continue showing interest? Know before you ask the question about the relationship. If you get that qualified 'no', with reasons given for not taking you up despite your both being interested in each other, you need to know where you stand. If you wish to continue showing interest, make sure that she knows you will do so, and make sure that this is acceptable to her. Doing so puts all your cards on the table and makes it so that there are no misunderstandings whatsoever. It is not asking her to change her mind - it is merely a request on your part to continue courting her in a gentlemanly, relaxed manner, giving her the option to bring back up the possibility of romance if she wishes it.

If this is welcome, consider carefully how to do it without stressing them by being too close, how to keep showing your interest by not dropping away entirely, and how you can relate to each other while waiting in limbo. Do *not* bring up again the question of relationship. The fact you're still flirting and talking with her and showing that interest that you were just before

asking is enough to show the question is still there. But it's in her court. Don't bring it up for a couple of months, at least - otherwise you're a pest.

Be very careful here. It is all too easy to read into everything after this point and truly screw up your friendship, let alone anything deeper. It is utter hell - trust me, I know. But it can be worth it. Eventually, you will either lose interest, they will tell you to stop - in short, move things to a 'no' - or they will take you up on your initial request for more than friendship. But it's in their court.

If they do say no, you need to know how to conduct yourself around her in the future. If you are good friends, very little should actually happen, unless you made it so awkward in asking that she'll always feel the awkwardness. After all, a good friend doesn't like causing their friends pain - and if you make it difficult, she'll feel the fact she's causing you pain, thus causing the awkwardness. Know where you stand - whether you can continue being friends, or whether you need to escape for a bit before taking the friendship back up again. Whatever you do, don't make it so that there's bad feeling. That's just handling life badly.

In the long-term, everything is a different ball-game. Your intent for this should be to make anything possible, really. If you get a 'yes', I sincerely hope you're still operating under the mandate of that answer for a very long time. If you get that 'no' - things can change over time. But wait a long time, so that things can change. You would be amazed what six months can do, or even longer. Just make sure that it is a long time - your feelings need to change too, or at least move with time and not simply remain

frozen in that previous moment. As for the qualified 'no', make it so that should at some point she changes her mind, she can come to you, or so that she'll be good friends with you and cheer you on when you find someone else. Should you still be interested in her later on, and you've been courting away for a long while without her telling you to quit... says something, doesn't it? You'll have figured out if you're getting strung along by a certain point. Just be sure to be able to acknowledge when things aren't going to change.

In Conclusion...

Dating is hell. I have never undergone anything that can make my heart pound as wildly, my lungs seize up so dramatically, or my brain fry in a pan as much as trying to get that girl right there - no, the one just to the right there - to agree to go have a coffee with me. I have made nearly every error possible for a guy to make while still staying with legally and morally safe grounds in trying to get that question across, and I'm still here, and still trying. I've even succeeded a time or two. The final point: don't give up hope. I've done so numerous times, and have been proven so, so very wrong. You may have found 'the one' - and may do so repeatedly. I have, much to my own amusement. My experience has taught me that there is a different 'one' for nearly every time in our lives, and that it is a rare (but wonderful) thing for one person to be that for all those times. Do not despair! There will be more chances, more opportunities, more people in your life - and finding all that out and learning from the experience of doing so is some of the best entertainment out there, not to mention good for getting your heart rate up for long periods of time. Give humanity a chance - you'll be surprised at the results"

DEFINITIONS:

Party: 1. (verb, transitive) To engage in markedly heterosexual activities (e.g.,

“She’s dressed like she wants to party.”) 2. (adj.) Exemplifying a proclivity for

heterosexual activity (e.g., “I hear she’s a party girl.”) 3. (noun) A social gathering.

Hopefully the above will be interesting feedback/reflections for your travels in dating.