

## Win-win dating - Mastering the deeper dynamics

### By Olga Sheean

Does the mere thought of dating make you queasy? Putting yourself out there, making conversation and figuring out whether the other person is trustworthy, solvent or maybe just physically/emotionally/legally available, can be a draining process—one that you may not want to even contemplate unless the candidate sounds ideal from the start.

But screening your dates won't necessarily do the trick. Despite all your efforts to find someone whose profile 'ticks all the right boxes', the next person you arrange to meet for coffee is going to trigger any unresolved issues lurking in your subconscious. Old patterns from your own conditioning are going to come up as soon as you start dating again—and it will all seem horribly familiar. The key to getting out of that loop is to figure out what those issues are and what their purpose is. Then dating becomes a whole new ballgame.

How do you do that? Ironically, your date will give you all the clues you need. If he is self-absorbed and doesn't seem interested in you, he's emotional insecurity and needs to impress; if she is critical of you or others, she has low self-worth and a need to blame others; if he seems angry or resentful about an ex-partner, there's a lack of self-love, resulting in manipulation and power struggles. But all of these scenarios are caused by a lack of self-acceptance and self-awareness. And, in all cases, you may think it's all about the other person—and make a run for the door.

If you do, you'll simply encounter the same annoying patterns further down the road. Anyone who triggers you emotionally has the same issues as you, so use your dates wisely—to figure out what needs to be addressed in you so you can 'upgrade' your love life. No date is ever a mistake. Each one will present you with exactly what you need in order to address your issues. And the most fundamental issue for everyone is a lack of self-acceptance. Our need for acceptance—in the form of love, money or recognition—distorts our personality, our self-expression and our sense of self. We spend our lives trying to obtain it, while subconsciously believing we don't deserve it. This sets us up for a lifetime of compromises, reactivity, judgements, projections and disappointments. What we don't realize is that demonstrating strong self-acceptance is the key to making our relationships work.

The trick is to start giving yourself the very quality you're not getting from your date. For example, if your date criticizes you, say something positive that makes you feel good about yourself; don't counter-attack, defend, justify or apologize, as this demonstrates low self-worth. If he talks only about himself, acknowledge him and ask (without sarcasm) if he's interested in knowing anything about you. (If not, thank him for his time and walk away. Resist the temptation to say (or think) "F you, pal", which also demonstrates low self-worth.) If she is reticent or cagey, unwilling to divulge anything meaningful about herself, look her right in the eye and share something deeply heartfelt and authentic. Remember: the goal here is not to get the other person to accept, respect or connect with you; it's to get you to practise accepting, respecting and connecting with yourself so that you start to attract partners with equally healthy self-worth and emotional integrity.

So think of dating as a way of embodying all the qualities you want in your relationship. Be you, not a reaction to the other person. Express your feelings honestly and be aware of how that feels. Say no to whatever doesn't feel right for you, and accept and validate the other person also. Don't try to impress them, if you find them attractive, or judge them, if you feel they're not what you want. They're there for you to discover and explore your feelings, values and boundaries, by relating as mindfully and honestly as you can.

Successful dating is not about trying to find the partner who'll give you what you've been missing; it's about making yourself emotionally complete so you attract a partner who's similarly whole and perfectly complements all that you are.

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