

## **“Four Ways to Set the Stage for a Great Relationship”**

*It's time. You're ready for a spouse, a mate, a permanent partner, a match to come strolling across your path. Maybe someone has already caught your eye. Or vice versa. Maybe you've checked-each-other-out/hung out/even gone out a few times. And there's enough interest to think about what comes next.*

*If you're like most people, you knew in about the first zero-to-ten minutes whether--or not--you were attracted. Maybe you even sensed the attraction was mutual. So that's great. Essential. And absolutely the easiest part of this match-finding process. There are three more major considerations.*

### **CASA: “home”**

*Think of this graceful Spanish word for “home” to remember **four considerations** for finding and being a partner who can go the distance . . .*

#### **C** Stands for competent and other C words

A lasting relationship takes both will and skill. And a lot of the skills for a strong life-partnership tend to begin with “C”: competent at communicating, conflict-managing, conscientiousness, compassion.

An engaged couple came to see me, complaining that they couldn't seem to have a constructive conflict. Both were very opinionated, and though highly attracted to each other, both felt misunderstood and abandoned by the other whenever they disagreed. Partner number-one, Mary, explained her side: She grew up in a family and culture where everyone firmly believed that, *“When you feel strongly about something, say it loudly.”* When an issue arose in the heart of this woman, she would choose a moment, organize her thoughts and, with accompanying big gestures, proceed to make her point with lots of vigor and volume. Her partner, James responded with sullen silence, and usually, a quick exit. In our second session, James shed some light on what was going on for him. Quietly he explained, *“In my family, first came the yelling, then came the hitting. When Mary gets loud, I know intellectually that it's different, but my body and heart shut down!”* Light bulbs when on in the room and these two proceeded to develop a more compassionate and conscious way of hearing each other.

Without the big “C” words, it may not be match. In this case, each partner was willing to learn from experience and the match grew even more clear and strong.

#### **FAQ. What makes you great in relationships? What are your growing edges?**

##### **A** Stands for available and accessible.

Are you geographically available? Emotionally accessible? Do you work 70+ hours a week? Are you already in a relationship and your present partner doesn't know you're available? What are you available for? What do you want to date?

People date for lots of reasons: to find fun, something to do on the weekends, sex, reassurance. And some, of course, are looking for a life partner. Assuming you're attracted, and assuming attraction gets us to spend time with that fascinating other person, what are your goals? What are the goals of the person you're interested in? What is s/he available for? Is your availability a match?

A man in his thirties named David came to see me about a dilemma: It was time. He was ready to settle down and start a family. David was desperately in love with Lauren and wanted with all his heart for her to be the right woman.

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They had traveled and skied and golfed together and were deeply attracted to each other. But Lauren didn't want anything to change. She had never seen a great marriage, didn't want to try it, and was clear about not wanting children. A great romantic, David had believed that love would conquer all, that he could change her heart and mind. But the more he tried, the more the friction between them grew. David was beginning to see this wasn't a match, at least right now. But he couldn't imagine that attraction and matching availability would ever come in the same package. David and Lauren were struggling to change each other rather than to accept each other's decisions.

Without shared availability to the same purpose, it's not a long-term match.

***FAQ. What are your goals in dating? What are you available for?***

## **S** Stands for Shared Values.

This brings up questions of family, religion, culture, children and long-held dreams. But the big-values questions, and the leading relationship stressors, that keep showing up in my office are always about time and money. Susan and Chris really wanted their relationship to work. They communicated well, and shared some of the same life goals. Both in their thirties, Susan was confident with her money and budgeting. As a small-business owner, she had worked hard, had few debts and lived comfortably. Chris made more money, was very generous, but had \$20,000 in credit card debt. My job was to ask the hard question: "Susan, would you take Chris to be your business partner?" Though Susan was ready to take Chris as her life-partner, she looked at her hands and guessed that, "A few things would have to change before they could be in business together." These two had some work to do on their shared money values before they could be a match.

***FAQ. What are the values that, for you, would make or break a relationship? Would you go into a business partnership with the person you're interested in?***

## **A** The final "A" stands for the ever-popular, instantly know-able and completely essential: attraction/affinity.

True attraction is the mysterious, fairly immediate and completely involuntary pull toward another. Simply put, if attraction is not there, it's not a match. And if it's the only thing there, it's not a match. There's a spiritual quality to attraction that I believe might be God's doing. After all, attraction gets you to spend time with that enthralling other person (and to see if the attraction is mutual). And crucially, if you're awake over time, you will find out about the other three considerations.

***FAQ. What do you notice about your experience of attraction? Do you see any patterns?***

As you risk clarity and emotional openness about your vision and values for your life, reality will irresistibly edge out fantasy. It takes time, patience and wisdom to savor and enjoy the process. One of my wise clients is a carpenter who knows the difference between a strong wall and a nice-looking patch. Three weeks after the break-up of a long-term relationship, with his heart still full of questions and pain, he mused about maybe dulling his pain with a new relationship. "Ah," he sighed, smiling, "I've still got some things to figure out. Dating right now might be a little bit of emotional spackle."