

Principle #1: Know Who You Are and What You Want

Making good long-term choices requires clarity about who you are and what you want. Many of us think we know exactly what this looks like. Most singles have their “list.” But really, what most people know and understand about themselves is like the tip of the iceberg – only the 10 percent that shows above the water. Your success and happiness relies on the 90 percent that is hidden beneath the surface.

The work you do to uncover this vital information about yourself (life purpose, life vision, values, relationship requirements, etc.) will make it easier to plot your course through life so that you can achieve your goals and dreams.

Principle #2: Learn How to Get What You Want

We all have fears and self-sabotaging beliefs that we are unaware of. Attitudes are internal beliefs that create your experience of yourself, of others, and of life. The way that you see things can be self-fulfilling: it will be true because you hold these beliefs and allow them to be true. Positive attitudes are productive; negative ones are unproductive. You can consciously choose the attitudes that serve you and support your life goals, and let go of those that sabotage you.

Focus on what you want; then learn how to bring everything in alignment with those goals, including your beliefs, attitudes, choices, and actions.

Principle #3: Be the “Chooser”

Many singles are insecure and stay safe by submissively letting others make the choices. Being the “Chooser” means taking initiative and responsibility for your outcomes by seeking to create what you want in your life. As a Chooser, you seek to always be “at choice,” and you don't restrict yourself to what, or who, chooses you.

Choosers share certain characteristics that empower them. They know what they want, and they know how to get it:

- Choosers are **proactive**. They don't habitually wait for things to happen. They don't merely react to events.
- Choosers are **positive**. They always anticipate success.
- Choosers **assume abundance**. They believe there will always be plenty of opportunities and resources.
- Choosers are **creative**. They seek new ideas and opportunities beyond the immediate past and present.

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- Choosers are **assertive**. They ask for what they want, and they say “no” to what they don't want.
- Choosers are **risk-takers**. They accept rejection and failure as part of life, and they don't take it personally. A rejection is nature's way of saying you aren't a good fit.
- Choosers are **goal-oriented**. They clearly define and vigorously pursue their goals.

Being a chooser takes a certain amount of confidence and effort, but everyone can do it. It's not a lack of talent or a failure of genetics that prevents people from being choosers. People who are not choosers have simply learned a set of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. When we grow up conditioned to please others and are not given permission to take risks, we can feel powerless to influence our outcomes and fear failure if we try. Many people will recognize these common obstacles to being the Chooser. All of these are learned, and all of them can be unlearned.

The obstacles to being a Chooser include:

- Low self-esteem (“I'm not good enough.”)
- Self-sabotaging beliefs and attitudes (“It won't happen for me”; “I can't.”)
- Conformity to social pressures (“I must adapt to be accepted and avoid rejection.”)
- Lack of creativity, information, or skill (“I don't know how.”)
- Gender roles (“It's not ladylike”; “It's not gentlemanly.”)
- Need to please others (“I need approval”; “I don't want to hurt anyone.”)

Some find it more comfortable and socially acceptable to be the Chooser with their friends, and in their recreational activities, finances, career, and other areas of their lives. But it is more difficult in the arena of intimate relationships, with emotionally complicated issues of gender roles, self-esteem, and sexuality. Many women who are successful, decisive, powerful executives in the workplace, have tremendous difficulty being assertive in their intimate relationships with men, for fear of being unfeminine. Both men and women know what their traditional, stereotypical roles are; however, most of today's singles don't subscribe to those roles, and so they are unclear about what to do or expect.

Principle #4: Balance Your Heart with Your Head

Is it chemistry or common sense? It's both! Singles can make their relationship choices consciously, paying full attention to their vision, values, goals, requirements, needs, and wants, while still feeling that powerful combination of chemistry and attraction. While some may fear that making conscious relationship choices diminishes romance, it can still be exciting!

We often have strong physical and emotional reactions to potential partners. At those times, we can feel more alive and excited than at almost any other time of our life, akin to the rush of adrenaline

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when skydiving or riding a roller coaster. In fact, these metaphors of thrilling movement often pop up when people describe their dating relationships: we “fall in love” and we’re “on a roller coaster.” At its most extreme, some become addicted to this feeling and move from relationship to relationship seeking to recapture and sustain it. Many singles, overwhelmed by these feelings, interpret them as “love,” and a sign that a relationship is “meant to be.”

These physical and emotional reactions are what people commonly have in mind when they think of *attraction*, *infatuation*, and *following your heart* when they first meet a potential partner. Most people would agree on an intellectual level that this is not the kind of love that they really expect to last. After all, this phenomenon occurs prior to really knowing and building a relationship with someone.

What do these feelings mean? Should we follow them or ignore them? Are they reliable guides?

Our **physical reactions** may include increased heart rate and blood pressure, feeling warm and perhaps sweating, tingling skin sensations, or sexual arousal. These responses are actually driven by pheromones (chemicals emitted to attract a partner), hormones such as oxytocin (which acts on the hypothalamus to produce emotions), PEA or phenyl ethylamine (natural amphetamine), dopamine and norepinephrine (natural mood enhancers), and testosterone (increases sexual desire). These chemical reactions are involuntary and strong, leading to powerful feelings of attraction.

Our involuntary **emotional reactions** can also be very powerful, and it's easy to understand why some may interpret them as "love." These reactions include anxiety, fear, self-consciousness, excitement, happiness, and infatuation (defined as strong feelings of romantic idealization). The theory of emotional attraction that makes the most sense is Harville Hendrix's concept of the “Imago”. According to Hendrix, we have an unconscious image of our ideal partner (or “Imago”). This Imago is composed of the positive and negative characteristics of our parents or caretakers. Hendrix theorizes that because we always seek to emotionally heal and complete ourselves, we are unconsciously attracted to potential partners who match our Imago. For example, someone who grew up with a critical parent might unconsciously choose a critical partner in the hopes of finally winning approval. Our Imago match is best suited to help us finish our unfinished childhood business because of their resemblance to the people who had the heaviest impact our early development.

What is the likelihood that our physically involuntary and emotionally unconscious attractions will result in good relationship choices? The failure rate of relationships suggests that the odds are pretty low. So how can we balance our heart with our head? Should we take drugs to prevent our biology from driving our partner choice? Should we defer dating and go into therapy to work on our unfinished childhood business to prevent our Imago from choosing a partner resembling our parents?

Our goal should be to use our physical and emotional reactions to potential partners as useful information, and balance them with our Requirements, Needs, and Wants to make conscious relationship choices.

Principle #5: Be Ready and Available for Commitment

Most singles are seeking a committed relationship and date with that goal in mind. Many are not ready for commitment for a variety of reasons, but they don't want to be alone, and so they date to find a partner anyway. When their dating strategy doesn't align with their readiness status, these singles unconsciously set themselves up for failure, complicating their lives and those of their dating partners.

Just because you want something doesn't necessarily mean you're ready for it. Many variables can interfere with your readiness for a committed relationship, such as being involved with someone else, going through a divorce, financial trouble, career demands, family obligations, physical health challenges, or mental/emotional health challenges such as addictions, depression, or anxiety disorders. It would be a tragedy to meet your soul mate and not be ready and then not be available. Getting involved in a relationship before you are ready can create a shaky foundation of unfinished business that eventually brings a relationship crashing down.

How do you know if you are ready for a committed relationship? Should you avoid dating if you are not ready for a committed relationship? If you do date, what should you do to align your dating strategy with your readiness status?

Principle #6: Use the Law of Attraction

Single and over 30? In spite of our progressive culture, many people may well feel stigmatized, as if there is something wrong with them. Aren't they supposed to be in a committed relationship? How can they feel comfortable as single people when their status is typically not supported by well-meaning friends and family? How can they embrace their singlehood when they don't really want to be single?

Being single is an opportunity to seize, not a disease or problem to solve.

The Law of Attraction dictates that you will attract a partner who mirrors who you are and where you are in your life. "Like attracts like" and "What is inside shows up on the outside." The partner you will find when you are in transition (divorce, career change, relocation, etc.) will reflect where you are in your life at that time - which may or may not work out in the long term. The Law of Attraction suggests that single people can maximize the likelihood they will get what they want in their lives and relationships by living the way that they want to live and planting seeds for the future that they want.

The Law of Attraction can work for you or against you; "Misery loves company" and "Success breeds success." Being aware of the Law of Attraction allows people to make conscious choices toward their goal of having a successful lifetime partnership.

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While we might dream of meeting our soul mate and living happily ever after, the reality is that most of us will spend time as single adults. We might wish to deny this reality, and when it happens, try to change it as quickly as we can, or we can accept this as a necessary and useful time of life.

Most people agree that singles need to emotionally resolve their previous relationship before becoming involved in a new one. How can they do this? How can they know when they or someone they are interested in has resolved the past and is genuinely emotionally available?

Many single people think that their life is on hold until they get into a relationship. But the simplest and most necessary way of resolving a previous relationship and preparing for the next relationship is for people to take a break and allow themselves to be single. Does this mean people need to be hermits? No, it simply means focusing on their own lives for a while before resuming their search to find a partner.

A successful committed relationship depends upon being ready physically, emotionally, financially, legally, and spiritually for the life and relationship that you want. In our consumer-oriented, instant gratification culture, *readiness* seems to be a foreign concept. People often seem to believe they are ready for something simply because they want it. There's no shortage of examples illustrating that getting what you want can have undesired consequences: AIDS/STDs, teenage pregnancy, lottery winners who can't handle their money and go broke, or celebrities who can't handle their fame and self-destruct.

When people are single, they have a golden opportunity to build the life that they want, and to use the Law of Attraction to become ready for and attract the partner that they want. A person may be single by necessity and not by choice. Their goal may be to find their life partner and lose their singleness forever. But if this is to be the last time in your life that you will be single, why rush it?

Principle #7: Gain Relationship Knowledge and Skills

Growing up we learn certain knowledge and skills from our parents, caregivers, and siblings. By the time we are adults our experience of the outside world and others has added immeasurably to our knowledge and skills. Yet many of us struggle to find happiness and fulfillment in the most important area of our lives – relationships.

The key to successful relationships lies in what you don't know, because this is where there are gaps in your knowledge and skills. "You don't know what you don't know."

How can you gain these relationship skills? It starts with being conscious of your blind spots in your current relationships. What are your attitudes and beliefs in your close relationships now and in the past? When you fail to learn from the past you are doomed to repeat your mistakes. Being open to

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learning right now will help you figure out what you need to know so you'll be ready when you meet your life partner.

Relationships are complex and require a variety of skills. If you are not competent in these skills it will be reflected in your current and future relationships. Identifying, learning and practicing the relationship skills (social, dating and intimacy skills) you need to improve will help set you up for success when you meet the love of your life.

Principle #8: Create a Support Community

To be successful in any area of life you need to have supportive people in your life.

Both men and women need at least one friend (and preferably more) of the opposite sex to help them scout, meet, sort, screen and test potential dates for them.

Singles need to consciously expand their support community and network to find a great partner. However, a single relationship no matter how compatible cannot meet all of our emotional and social needs. It is therefore important that we develop friendships to meet many of those needs, as a single and as part of a couple.

This is especially important in today's world because we are such a mobile society, with many people living and working away from where they grew up. The number of people who live alone has increased since 1960 and many of those tend to live isolated social lives.

The complexities and conflicts of any relationship – whether it's a partner, family, or friend – can prove to be challenging. But if you are NOT learning how to relate with friends and family, then you can expect this skill deficit to continue when you are in a love relationship. It makes sense to build your social network to gain and hone your relationship skills, as a way of preparing for, finding, and keeping a successful relationship.

Principle #9: Practice Assertiveness

To get what you really want, you must say "No" to what you don't want. This is a challenge for those of us who were raised to obey our parents, teachers, employers, and to conform to get along in life. Few of us are taught how to be effectively assertive, and we must learn this on our own as adults. This is the most critical and difficult skill for many. But it is also the most satisfying skill to master, and it can be learned by anyone.

Assertiveness is important and singles can get what they want in their life and relationships by practicing assertiveness.

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You have needs and boundaries. Everyone does. A boundary is the line between what is OK and not OK for you in a relationship. A relationship will not work if requirements are unmet. In Principle #3 we highlighted the importance of being the Chooser by taking responsibility for your outcomes. Practicing assertiveness is how you do so. The need to practice assertiveness and the costs of not doing so applies to all situations and relationships, not just couples.

Assertiveness feels risky. You want to love and be loved. You want acceptance, connection, and harmony, which are threatened by asserting your boundaries and saying “No.” Being a pleaser often feels safer than being a Chooser, and it usually results in immediate, short-term acceptance and harmony. It is strongly tempting to avoid assertiveness if it risks conflict, disconnection, and unhappiness. We use the term *practice assertiveness* because for most of us this will never be an effortless first response, and it requires continuous practice.

If assertiveness is so risky and difficult, and it's so much easier to just go along, why bother? The answer is that by avoiding assertiveness, you deny your own needs and boundaries. By not telling or living your truth, you sacrifice an authentic connection with your partner and sabotage the long-term sustainability of your relationship. Your unmet needs will result in your unhappiness, and while your first response may be to blame your partner, the problem and solution actually belongs to you.

The first step in being assertive is to know your needs and wants. We are typically conscious only of the tip of the iceberg. The most reliable clue that you are experiencing an unmet need and must practice assertiveness to get it met, is when you encounter an issue. Issues are unmet needs, and typically appear as a physical sensation of stress and discomfort, accompanied by negative thoughts.

For example, if your friend wakes you up by calling at 3:00am in the morning for something that could have waited until later, you might experience a physical sensation of tension and increased blood pressure, along with thoughts such as, “How inconsiderate! Why couldn't she call me at a more reasonable hour?” If you were not previously aware that you had a boundary around receiving telephone calls while sleeping, your stress and discomfort are literally a wake-up call that this is an issue for you.

In response to an issue, let's examine your choices. You could:

1. Submissively go along with it for the sake of peace and harmony in the relationship
2. Aggressively act out your thoughts and feelings and tell your friend off
3. Complain like a victim and ask her why she is doing this
4. Be assertive, explain your boundary, and enforce it

The first three choices are common knee-jerk reactions that don't serve your needs or the long-term viability of the relationship.

An assertive response requires:

- **Self-awareness:** immediate awareness of your thoughts and feelings, and a realization that this situation doesn't work for you.
- **Ownership:** to let go of your negative thoughts and feelings, adopt an attitude that your friend means well, might not know this is a problem for you, and that it is your job to let them know.
- **Communication Skills:** to communicate your issue clearly, request what you need, and handle possible defensiveness.
- **Risk-taking:** you are prepared to risk conflict, and even the relationship, to resolve this issue and get your need met.

Principle #10: Be a Successful Single

It might seem like a paradox: why should I focus on being a successful single when I really want to be in a relationship?

Being singles does not mean you have to put your life on hold. This only leads to unhappiness. The key is living your life fully in the present, and letting go of attachment to future outcomes.

Ask yourself “Am I truly happy living the life I want, while I am single?”

The Law of Attraction assures that “misery loves company.” This means that if you apply emotional energy to anything, you draw it to you. If you are unhappy about your life you are going to attract more unhappiness. Similarly, success breeds success. To attract a happy and successful relationship, you must be a happy and successful single. By living the life you want, you attract the opportunities, people, and resources that align with where you want to go.

Every day, devote the time and energy to yourself that you need to create the life you want. When you are a successful single, you are a beacon for your lifetime partner, making it easier for him/her to find you.