



With the possible, single exception of global, thermonuclear war, dating has got to be the hardest, cruelest, most grueling, unusually deceptive, extraordinarily haphazard and exorbitantly expensive undertaking between human beings since the dawn of time.

An overstatement? Hardly. Everyone we know has had his/her full share of horror stories and battle scars. Yet we still manage to stay in the fray, year after disappointing year, gamely hoping (praying?) that the very next person we encounter will be The One...

What makes this seemingly innocent social activity between consenting adults such a blueprint for utter catastrophe?

To paraphrase the real estate industry's classic benchmark for property valuation, "Location, Location, Location," the pitfalls of dating can be summed up with, "Agenda, Agenda, Agenda." In other words, it's each party's real intentions going in -- i.e. mis-communicated real intentions -- that gets us clobbered every single time.

Let's start with an obvious oversimplification, which we all know, for the most part, happens to be absolutely true: Guys generally have one agenda, gals have another. Okay? There. We've said it for the record in black and white.

We also know that starting any kind of relationship, be it social or business, "coming from two entirely different perspectives with two entirely different game plans" virtually assures a no-win outcome. That means -- if a lady accepts an invitation for a date thinking this guy's a good bet to become her future One-and-Only. And if the guy asks a lady out simply because she's a knockout, well, somebody is inevitably going to get hurt. Probably both of us.

I'm an "ex-dater," now happily married with two children. Through much trial, error and pain, I stumbled upon "**Cliff's Ten Golden Rules of Serious Dating**":

1. **Set an Agenda** — Since I can't control anyone else's thoughts or actions, I decided once and for all to control my OWN actions and set my own agenda. In this case, I wanted to get married, and I made sure to communicate this to everyone I knew!
2. **Be Proactive** — I stopped relying on "chance" encounters, and decided to proactively go out there and meet my future wife. I knew I could never make Ms. Right magically appear, but I sure wanted to avoid spending significant time in places she wasn't likely

to be. I made sure I placed myself in those environments that I knew would be the most conducive to meeting the right kind of person. For me, one key environment was my local Aish HaTorah branch. Sure enough, I met my wife in a class on -- what else? -- “relationships!”

3. **Make a “Spec's” List** — I made a list of criteria in great detail (and why not? I was beseeching the Master of the Universe!) for exactly for the type of person I was looking for. This was the single best tool I had to avoid wasting valuable time. How can you find something if you don't know what you're looking for?
4. **Pick the Right Crowd** — I decided to avoid any and all individuals who were clearly counterproductive to my newly stated “mission.” (Note: This was painful!)
5. **Make a Fresh Start** — Since I wanted to start with a perfectly clean slate, I threw away the photos, phone numbers and personal keepsakes of every woman I had ever dated. No more casual phone calls or birthday cards -- no more contact whatsoever. Business is business!
6. **No Expectations** — I realized, once and for all, that I wasn't going to “change” anyone, nor was anyone likely to “change” for me. I learned the hard way that expecting anyone to significantly change over the course of time is naïve and counterproductive.
7. **Get a Second Opinion** — I picked two close, trusted friends to rely on who knew me inside and out. I made sure they met anyone I seriously considered becoming involved with, and I listened carefully to their impressions.
8. **Time Limit** — Once I met someone who was in the ballpark, I gave myself an ironclad time limit of six weeks to find out. For me, this was a sufficient amount of time. If I wasn't sure by then, I knew it wasn't going to happen.
9. **Watch and Learn** — “Kindness” is a mandatory quality that must be at the very top of everyone's pre-qualifying list of specifications. If someone's awfully nice to you, but awfully mean to his/her brother, mother, business associate or headwaiter, it's time to cut your losses and move on -- quickly.
10. **No Physical Intimacy** — This was the toughest one of all, but absolutely necessary. Once we become physically involved, our judgment becomes irreparably clouded and we lose all our objectivity. Obviously there has to be “chemistry,” but we're looking for a Life Partner here, someone to raise a family with! “Character” comes first and last. Once trust, mutual respect and common goals are established, all that terrific chemistry that was put on hold takes over and love will inevitably follow.

Even if you have to throw out all the other nine rules, stick to Number Ten at all costs. When it comes to dating, physical intimacy is the most seductive, potentially damaging pitfall of them all. Remember something, ladies -- (Guys, don't kill me for this) -- if a guy wants to become intimate with you, I guarantee he isn't doing it for you.

These rules are guaranteed to get you through the dating process relatively unbattered. It isn't “rocket science.” It's actually harder than rocket science -- and it's called “common sense.” The older we get the better we (hopefully!) know ourselves. When you finally do

meet The One you've been waiting for, don't wait around second-guessing yourself till the cows come home (old Jewish proverb). Make your move!

Trust me (old Hollywood proverb). You'll be glad you did!

*This article is reprinted with permission from the Speeddating web site at [www.speeddating.com](http://www.speeddating.com). Speeddating is a program of Aish HaTorah, an international organization devoted to drawing adult Jews closer to Judaism. For more information about Aish HaTorah or speeddating in the Boston area, visit the web site [www.aish.com/boston](http://www.aish.com/boston), email [bostonspeeddating@aish.com](mailto:bostonspeeddating@aish.com), or call (617) 731-1324 ext. 16.*