

NAVIGATE THE DATE



In your late teens and twenties, meeting people is almost seamless; you're often out socialising whether at university, the hippest coffee bar, at house parties or clubs and you always seem to bump into people you know.

Text by **Skye Forrester**

The bottom line is, when you're young, you have a far more active social life whether you plan to or not. This creates a good environment to invite new people into your life and expand on your dating circle.

SEEKING SINGLE PROFESSIONALS

If you, like most established professionals, chose your career to be the focus of your life early on, you'll find yourself in this 'dating game' a little later on than others. You've been focussed on making a success of yourself and sharing your talent with the world; and now that you've checked that off your list, you're ready to settle your heart and begin a journey with someone you love.

So, where do you meet new people? While our family might know us better than we know ourselves, getting them to set us up on dates is a recipe for disaster. There's always drinks with the boys for a night on the prowl, but that's fast becoming more difficult to choreograph than Olympic synchronised swimming. If the last person you went on a proper date with (5 years ago) has now married one of your best friends, it might also be time to expand your circle.

With the advent of technology, the thought of getting into the dating scene digitally can leave you in cold sweats. Is Facebook a legitimate way to get in touch with people? Or is that the digital booty-call? You've probably heard enough Tinder disaster date stories to know that you'd rather swipe left on the idea and you've read the news on Ashley Maddison hacks, so you won't be sending personal details over the internet any time soon – no matter the website.

This doesn't leave us with too many options. Leave it up to faith, kismet or serendipity? Who knows, maybe the love of your life will be standing in front of you in the queue at Woolies one day. Is it time to take your mother up on that date with a woman she met in her prayer group? Maybe she does know what she's talking about.

MODERN DAY CUPID

Before you take anyone up on that blind date, maybe there's room for just one more suggestion. What about seeking guidance from a match maker? Believe it or not, matchmaking is an ancient practice as old as marriage itself. Match makers were thought to be essential advisors and helped people in their communities find true, lasting love.

We had the pleasure of sitting down with South Africa's modern day cupid, Theo Malherbe, to find out a little more about match-making in contemporary South Africa and what it takes to make connections that last.

Theo is the founder of The Only Social Club – a corporate dating agency for single professionals. With a decade of industry experience, Theo has certainly seen it all; here he shares some of his wisdom and lessons with you.

There's no shortage of passion when Theo speaks about what he does – finding people true love is the fuel he lives on. "I want to see your relationship succeed; it brings me great joy". Theo has had countless successes bringing people together all over the country – "And I've been to a few of those weddings; which I'm also very proud of."

IT STARTS WITH YOU

While Theo delights in seeing a romance blossom; he's also seen how relationships can fail when people misrepresent themselves. "It's paramount to be completely honest in what you're looking for." says Theo. When Theo experiences mismatches in his service of love, nine times out of ten, it's because someone hasn't been totally transparent about what they're looking for.

This is possibly the most difficult step because it requires some soul-searching and asking yourself some tough questions. Do you really want children? How important is a big wedding? Can you live with a smoker? Can you date someone from a different culture or race? Having a good relationship with yourself and understanding your relationship absolutes will bring you strides toward finding a sustainable love.

"Sometimes people aren't ready for love, but they're looking for a relationship. That's one way to attract the wrong partner." It's so important to be honest with yourself about why you're seeking a relationship. This way you get to build a clear picture of the person you're looking for and will give your match-maker more tools to work with in helping find love. It will also help you to identify when love comes knocking.

It's also vital to be patient and understand that speaking to a match maker is one step in a long process. As Theo puts it: "It's a journey and a process, not instant gratification". Not everything will happen according your timeline and you may have to venture a little out of your comfort zone

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to identify the answers to the questions above. Theo says people tend to give up too easily, even once they've had a date. He suggests seeing the person two or three times before you make your decision. People are just people and you never know what they're going through. Writing someone off because of one experience isn't making an informed decision. You might even learn something about yourself too. “Be honest. Treat people the way you want to be treated and see the experience for what it is”, says Theo.

THE MODERN GENTLEMAN'S SIX RULES FOR DATING

To help out the modern gentleman in his search for true love, Theo has put together The Modern Gentleman's Six Rules for Dating. “Old rules about chivalry and gentlemanly behaviour now become essential to building meaningful connections” says Theo. “This can be daunting if you're used to the fast-food version of dating. To increase your chances of finding lasting love in the dating jungle, you need to go into dating with an eye on the long-term”.

Taking a cue from hundreds of men and women across South Africa on what they want from a meaningful first, second and seventeenth date that puts human connection front and centre, here are some rules for dating that will increase your chance of creating a lasting connection with someone – and, find true love.

Rule 1 - The golden rule of first dates: Everything is PG13. So tame your drinking, don't be late, don't swear, don't tell that really inappropriate joke (no matter how funny it seems) and leave your prejudices at the door. Offer her your arm when you walk, and don't be discouraged if the evening doesn't end in a passionate embrace.

Rule 2 - Dress well: This doesn't mean wear a tuxedo at all times. Being overdressed can be just as uncomfortable for your date as underdressing. Generally, a collared shirt or nice t-shirt, blazer, fitted pants and good shoes works for most dates. Be clear about where you're meeting so that she can also dress for the occasion. Take care of your grooming – don't let ear and nose hairs grow wild. And take it easy with the aftershave!

Rule 3 - Open the door: The car door, the door to the restaurant, the door to her apartment. Be polite and let her through. Do the same for other women, families, and the elderly. It's a simple sign of respect that costs you nothing and places you firmly in the realm of gentleman. Chivalry goes a long way.

Rule 4 - Have some manners: Table manners, that is. Let her sit down first, and be polite to the wait-staff, even if they completely mess up your order. Don't chew with your mouth open, don't shove an entire slice of pizza into your mouth, and don't make the scchrrrrlllp noise as you suck the meat off your chicken wings.

Rule 5 - Be interested (and interesting): Ask her about herself and, when she responds, listen, maintain eye contact, and make encouraging sounds and gestures that tell her you want to hear her story. When it's your turn to speak, try to be humble and understated but don't undermine your achievements. Have the confidence to be yourself without being boastful or arrogant.

Rule 6 - Splitting the bill: This is often where things get really awkward and uncomfortable. Do you pay? Does she pay? Do you split the bill? For first dates, splitting the bill is the safest route. If you feel it is appropriate, then offer to pay the bill. Don't ever let her or expect her to pay, though.

FIND YOUR MATCH

Comments Malherbe: “I've helped hundreds of people meet their perfect match over the past ten years. For a while, a lot of people who got in touch with me were looking for a quick fix (as if there are any quick fixes when it comes to love!) “It's easy to think you can meet your perfect match with just a flick of your finger over your smartphone screen. But that kind of connection will disappear quicker than you can say “tinder”. For a real shot at meeting your perfect match, you need to slow things down.

“We've seen how the slow movement took hold in the worlds of food, beer, travel, and living. Its success is largely thanks to people missing the feeling of being connected – to places, to food, to life, to other people.”

For the same reasons, dating is now also slowing down. Traditional matchmaking services that focus on more natural forms of dating are once again replacing the quick-fix dating apps that gained traction and popularity over the past few years. Instead of clicking and swiping through hundreds of profiles and saying yes to every date, people are taking the time to really understand what kind of person they're looking for. And this changes the dating game.

The Only Social Club is more than a mere dating site; it's a personalised experience conducted with integrity and confidentiality. You can find out more about the service and how to set up your one-on-one matchmaker session on www.theonlysocialclub.co.za.