

msn Dating & Personals



Don't be a fool for love

By Margot Carmichael Lester

The concepts of love and foolery have been inextricably linked since the beginning of time (or at least the beginning of dating). And many of us know the "I can't believe I did that!" feeling after we wake up and discover that we've been putting up with a two-timer/caterer to a narcissist/insert the "what was I thinking?!" example of your choice here.

But being a fool for love isn't necessarily a rite of passage or an inevitable life experience. In fact, if you follow this advice (instead of your heart), you might just find that the only sting you'll feel is from Cupid's arrow—not from being an April fool for love.

Buyer beware

"We instinctively look for the good in people, especially the people we love," says Janice Hoffman, author of *Relationship Rules*. "We don't want to see their flaws or mistakes. We may even recognize someone's behavior as a red flag and then immediately choose to ignore it. We do this hoping that our partner will change—soon."

But ignoring red flags over a period of time can be asking for trouble or heartbreak. To avoid that, watch for clues. "Be aware, be awake, listen," she suggests. "Be aware of how you interact with someone you are dating. Be awake to the signs and don't ignore them thinking you might be overreacting." For instance, Lisa, 27, of Portland, ME, was willing to accept her new guy David's unpredictable schedule. "He was always cancelling and rescheduling at the last minute, but I figured that was the life of a musician—he was a guitarist. But then a friend pointed out that I only saw him about a third of the times we had plans together, and I realized I was waiting for him to change—something he had no interest in doing! We stopped dating, and I now pay careful attention to whether a guy is available for a relationship or not before I let myself fall head over heels."

Get together

Many savvy people turn fools for love when pacing their online dating. Why? "In the early stages, it's easy to know anything and everything about a potential partner without *really* knowing them," explains Celeste Simmons, co-author of *You Know She's a Princess When...* "When you are looking for a love connection, you are looking for a physical chemistry or compatibility. Be aware that while someone's profile and photo may look good, it's no match for that physical connection from a first date."

So resist falling for this person before you even meet. "Getting to know someone takes more than a picture, IMs, emails, profiles, and phone calls," Simmons cautions. "Reserve your decisions for after you and your potential partner have had plenty of face-to-face time."

Say no to settling

It's a little too easy for some of us to settle for less than our ideal, especially if we've been looking for a while. "Never settle!" asserts Scott Kudia, author of *If This is Love, Why Am I Unhappy? The 3 Keys to Having the Relationship You Want*. "You deserve more than that," he says.

To make sure you get it, turn down the volume on your head, heart and libido and listen to your gut instead. "Trust your instincts, and be willing to walk away from someone," he says. That's what Paul, 36, of St. Paul, had to do. All his buddies were getting hitched, and he was feeling the pressure to do the same thing. When he met Wendy, he thought he'd found his mate—she had so many of the qualities he sought, except their senses of humors just didn't mesh. "I tried to tell myself that didn't matter much in comparison to all the other ways we were compatible, but then we went to the movies one night—a comedy I had been waiting to see. I loved it, she didn't get it. It felt strange to be in a theatre full of laughing people...except for my girl. It made me feel lonely even when I was with her, and I knew that moving ahead with her would be the wrong step to take. There are some things you can't compromise on."

Use your head

"Quite often, people are blinded with emotion," notes family-law specialist Stacy Phillips of Los Angeles. "A strong attraction is what all of us want to

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feel when choosing a mate, but we have to ask whether that mate's values align with ours." To avoid that, step back and think the relationship through.

"Try to put your feelings aside momentarily, and take a close and impartial look at the attributes of your mate, his or her values, characteristics and the differences between the two of you—many of which may be negotiable," she says. "If it appears your instincts and intuition are telling you one thing and your impulses another, go with your instincts and intuition." That's what Joanne, 31, of Albany, NY, had to do. She was swept away by the spontaneous lifestyle of Greg, a writer. "He'd have me call into work sick so we could go away for a spontaneous long weekend. He'd encourage me to cancel plans with my friends and family so we could catch some concert he just found out about. At first, it was all very exciting and romantic—kind of like a whirlwind. Then I realized I was disappointing some of the people who were most important to me and putting my job in jeopardy. When I explained this to him and told him I couldn't be as spontaneous anymore, he got mad and pouted like a little kid. I realized, as exciting as things had been, my wild ride with Greg had to end."

Taking heed of these tips will help you beat a foolproof path to love's door.

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