

Traits of the Ideal Mate

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I never thought I would find myself in this situation. But it happened. I was in my 50s and single. I had been married for over 25 years and assumed I would always be married. But life doesn't always turn out like you think it will.

After becoming separated and then divorced, it took about five years to sort out my life. During this time, I went through many struggles including striving for reconciliation, grieving my divorce, building new routines, landing in a rebound relationship, exiting a rebound

relationship, acknowledging being single, and accepting my new self. If someone had told me I would go through all of that and it would take five years, I don't know that I could have handled it. Good that I didn't know.

After five years and being on my own, but ready to date, I turned to online dating. I had no idea how to date, much less navigate online dating. I was later told by my future wife that I did a poor job of describing myself in my profile. In my defense, I was more interested in what women had to say about themselves than spending time on myself. Of course, that was naïve thinking, but I was anxious to get my life going in a new direction and meet new people.

The online dating service allowed me to input a few parameters about my ideal mate. So, I input what the site allowed and hit the enter button for the system to do its search. Within a second or two, the results were done. Out of about thirty-thousand single women in the greater metropolitan area in which I lived, I received zero matches. That's right, zero. There was not one single woman who met my selection criteria. Uh oh!

Fast forwarding through my dating experience, it took a couple of months of perusing hundreds of women's profiles, going on dates with about a dozen of them, and then meeting an amazing woman who later became my new wife. While dating was extremely interesting, especially at this age, online dating and getting remarried isn't the story I want to emphasize. The real experience I learned from dating is deciding the traits to look for in a mate.

You may believe that your perfect mate is out there, somewhere in the world, and all you need to do is meet enough people and be patient enough to find that person. Or you may believe that there is no such person as a perfect mate. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but I don't know anyone that is perfect, especially after you get to know them! Therefore, the selection process of finding my ideal mate didn't depend on finding perfection.

My selection process, however, did depend on being very selective. Dating for me still involved sticking to a list of must-have attributes I wasn't willing to sacrifice. I knew I probably wouldn't find someone who had every nice-to-have attribute I wished for, but I wasn't willing to settle for someone who didn't have my must-have attributes. So, I needed to identify my must-haves versus nice-to-haves. As my starting point, I knew that relationships require compromise so one of the must-have traits had to be openness (*eagerness* was my nice-to-have version of *openness*) to new ways of thinking and doing life with someone.

The challenge I had was keeping my must-haves to a realistic amount. I knew if I had too many must-haves, I'd struggle to ever meet someone that measured up. So, I tried to keep my list as short as possible without missing a trait I would later regret. If you've done this exercise, you probably know how hard it is to have a short list of must-have attributes. Especially when you consider how many traits we humans possess and the thousands of attributes we use to describe people.

After many periods of reflection, I settled on thirteen must-haves. Here they are: spiritually like-minded, honorable character, loving and respectful, mentally healthy, physically active, attractive, intelligent and eager to keep developing, educated, similar interests and values, politically like-minded, effective communicator, good influence on me, and sexually like-minded. Yes, this is a long list, but you should have seen my nice-to-haves! And yes, my new wife meets all of these must-have criteria.

Besides the importance of having a list of must-have attributes and staying committed to it, another big takeaway from dating was the importance of being able to merge two lives and grow together as a unit. Of course, people remain individuals and need to function as healthy independent people, but marriage is about spending your life *happily with* someone else. Those two words, *happily with*, require that you and your mate understand each other, strive to meet each other's needs, and sacrifice self-interests as needed to maintain "happily with." This again confirmed the need for an *openness to change* trait in my mate.

If you date and marry early in life, you grow together with your mate. Most of life's history is created with your mate. You learn and do life together. You develop your must-have attributes with your mate. Dating later in life is very different. You bring history, traditions, and entrenched behaviors into your relationship. You bring experience, engrained habits, and opinions to the relationship. You bring in an established family. So, when dating people in their fifties, for example, there are many areas to discuss and differences to overcome. Harmony then only happens with someone who is openminded and eager to grow anew together.

There were many principles I learned from my dating experience. Here are the top five I believe are most important to consider when dating:

- Know and stay committed to the must-have qualities you want in your mate.
- Be self-assured and patient enough to not compromise your must-haves.
- Expect differences and a [storming phase](#) that requires deep and respectful conversation.
- Be open and willing to put the other person first and compromise on your nice-to-haves.
- Love and respect the person for who they are before you glue the relationship together with sex.

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