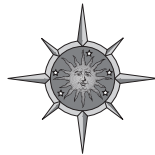


You Unstuck

Mastering the New Rules of
Risk-Taking in Work and Life

Libby Gill



TRAVELERS' TALES
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PALO ALTO

CHAPTER 8

Risks of the Heart

*Love takes off masks that we fear we cannot live
without and know we cannot live within.*

—JAMES BALDWIN

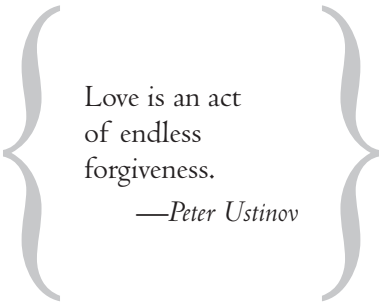
For attorney Shela Dean, three times was definitely the charm. Married and divorced twice, when Shela married husband number three, French horn player Dale Dean, she knew it would be forever. Never mind the statistics that predict that approximately 65 percent of third marriages will end in divorce. Ten years later, Shela and Dale's marriage is more rock solid than ever.

Shela credits the couple's focus on daily kindness for fortifying their marriage so it would withstand life's inevitable challenges. Their relationship was put to the test when a business venture failed and they were forced to sell their beloved San Francisco area home and move across the country to start all over again.

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Shela admits that she and Dale sometimes got stuck in relationship ruts accompanied by bursts of anger, frustration, and guilt over what went wrong and who did what to whom, but their desire for deep connection and honest communication ultimately pulled them through. She says lots of laughter didn't hurt either, but she certainly didn't expect a shared joke about their relationship to become the basis for a new business.

Theorizing that regularly making loving gestures toward your partner was as just as powerful as sexual foreplay, Shela joked that the couple should start a "Frequent Foreplay Miles" account. Similar to an airline miles program, it would remind them when they were scoring big or losing points with each other. When friends and family clamored for more information, a business was born. Shela now uses her "Frequent Foreplay Miles" program to remind couples that while relationships are work they should also be fun. Check out www.FrequentForeplayMiles.com if you want a new lease on your love life.



Love is an act
of endless
forgiveness.

—Peter Ustinov

A role model for getting unstuck with grace and good humor despite enormous pressure, Shela went from relationship rut to successful marriage. In this chapter, we'll be focusing on how you can create and sustain romantic relationships and friendships that enrich your life, instilling it with meaning in a way that nothing else ever could. Because, cliché or not, success is pretty meaningless if you don't have loved ones with whom to share it.

When I first began coaching, I was surprised how often (and sometimes how quickly) career conversations turned into relationship discussions. Men, women, CEOs, entry-level workers, it seemed as though everyone had an issue with a friend, spouse, or significant other. It didn't take me long to realize that there are plenty of people who, despite being successful in many areas of their lives, are deeply dissatisfied with the quality—and sometimes the quantity—of their connections with other people.

What I discovered was that the often-cited challenges of time and distance were rarely the reasons that people failed to sustain meaningful friendships. Even when those challenges were legitimate, they were merely logistical issues that, for the most part, could be solved with a little compromise and a calendar meeting. In romantic relationships, the complaint I heard most often was about the scarcity of quality prospects “out there,” so I saw people settling for someone who wasn't a fit or ignoring that aspect of life for years on end. What I came to believe was that the real sticking point in both situations was people's fear of sharing the deepest—and often darkest—aspects of their personalities with others. Once again, it goes back to fear of failure. In this case, fear of relationship failure.

But here's the rub. If you want rich relationships that go beyond surface small talk or short-term flings, you have to challenge your limiting assumptions and commit to taking risks unlike any you've attempted so far in the *You Unstuck* process. Because, more than any other kind of risk-taking, risks of the heart require that you reveal your emotionally authentic self.

If you're unwilling or unable to do that, you run the biggest risk of all—staying stuck in a relationship rut. Ask yourself if any these ruts describe you:

Relationship Ruts

1. There's just nobody out there who's right for me
2. I ask for very little in my relationships and that's exactly what I get
3. I don't want to get hurt so I avoid dating and romance altogether
4. I sometimes find myself wondering what happened to all my old friends
5. I'm putting off a romantic relationship until I lose more weight, have more time, make more money, find a better job, etc.

By this point in the *You Unstuck* process, you're probably pretty adept at identifying the limiting assumptions that keep so many of us stuck. So, take a moment and write down the assumptions behind each scenario above, then match them against my list below.

Limiting Assumptions

1. If I could find the right person, I wouldn't have any relationship problems
2. I don't deserve much (like love, affection, or loyalty) in my relationships
3. I'm bound to get rejected and I can't handle rejection
4. I should have lifetime friends without any effort on my part
5. It's only because of (your excuse here) that I don't have a romantic partner

How was your limiting assumption radar? Getting sharper as you go along, I'll bet. If any of those assumption-riddled ruts sum up your experience, it's time to ask yourself some hard questions about what you really want in your relationships and

Assumptions are
the termites of
relationships.

—Henry Winkler

how you're going to get it. I covered family issues extensively in my last book, *Traveling Hopefully: How to Lose Your Family Baggage and Jumpstart Your Life* (which I encourage you to read if you need help in that area), so we'll be focusing exclusively on friends and

romantic partners here. We'll take a look at relationship with colleagues and co-workers later on in Chapter 10.

Friendships, though sometimes tricky, are generally easier to navigate than romantic relationships since they rarely include the thorny issues of children, sex, money, or households. There's also usually less at stake emotionally and fewer expectations with friends than significant others. So let's start at the low-risk rung of the relationship ladder by getting you unstuck in your friendships. We'll work our way up to romantic relationships after that.

FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS

Friendship comes with some benefits that might surprise you. In addition to the obvious advantages like support and camaraderie, having close friends has proven health benefits. According to Dr. Michael Wetter, division chief of Adult Psychiatry

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Services for Kaiser Permanente in Hayward, California, if you're not regularly releasing pent-up feelings by sharing them with friends, those emotions can build over time and result in high blood pressure, moodiness, and sleep problems. The health issues that arise from not sharing negative emotions can actually be far worse than the original feelings themselves.

Numerous studies have shown that both men and women live healthier and longer lives when they have a network of close friends, but the positive effects of friendship may be more profound among women. After noticing that while men typically responded to stressful events with the "fight or flight" reaction that you read about in Chapter 2, Dr. Shelley Taylor from UCLA realized that women under stress often responded by bonding together. Recognizing a huge gap in the scientific data since most stress studies were performed on male subjects, Dr. Taylor and her colleagues conducted research with female subjects and concluded that women under stress react completely differently from men. The team dubbed this reaction the "tend and befriend response" when they observed that, when stressed, women reach out to other women. Most likely, this is an instinctive survival mechanism that prompts women to take care of themselves and their children, while men were either fighting or fleeing from danger.

The scientists noted that women in stressful situations showed elevated levels of oxytocin, a calming hormone that is also released during sex and breastfeeding. The increase of oxytocin in the system reduced stress levels, lowered blood pressure, and boosted the immune system. Of course, most women readily recognize the natural inclination of women to reach out and befriend other women, as well as the positive side effects on mental and physical well-being. Isn't it nice that science has

confirmed the importance of attending women's networking events or having a regular night out with the girls?

RISK-TAKER'S TIP Even when you're not with a friend, getting out among people can give you a satisfying feeling of connectedness. Why do you think Starbucks and its clones have become such hits? Because they continue the age-old café and pub tradition where people congregate not just to imbibe but to commune with others. So, get out and join the people at a coffee shop, lunch spot, or local park. If you're traveling alone, spend a little time in a lively lounge or lobby instead of holed up in your hotel room. It'll raise your spirits and boost your energy!

FAST FRIENDSHIPS

The challenge in our increasingly mobile and technology-addicted world is staying in contact with old friends and making new ones, especially after a life transition like relocation, divorce, or career change. As adults, it's no longer like those childhood days when you seemed to have a never-ending supply of new friends that you'd meet at school, summer camp, sports teams, ballet class, Brownies or Scouts. All you had to do was say, "Wanna play?" and a friendship was forged.

Unfortunately, grown-up friendships are a lot trickier. By adulthood, most of us have learned to cherish our old friends, but few of us have learned skills for reaching out to new people or turning acquaintances into friends. Compounding this scenario, few of us are willing to admit that we lack the quantity and quality of friendships that we desire. Sadly, if people

realized how common this problem was, they'd find it much easier to reach out to others who are longing for the same kinds of connections that they are.

I once coached an executive named Barbara who felt friendless and alone when she relocated from St. Louis to Chicago for a new job. As the months went by and she realized she'd made very few new girlfriends, she began to despair, thinking of herself as a "friendless loser." Never mind that she'd lived in Chicago for less than a year, that she worked for a small company, or that she actually did have quite a few friends back in St. Louis. The internal message she kept repeating was, "I have no friends, therefore I am a loser, and because I am a loser, I have no friends."

Talk about a self-fulfilling prophecy! I pointed out the sheer fallacy of her circuitous conclusion and had her ask herself some *Challenge Questions*, including:

- ◆ Is my assumption/conclusion accurate?
- ◆ What's the worst that could happen if I reached out to others?
- ◆ Whatever the reaction, would it matter one year from now?

Barbara decided the very worst that could happen if she reached out to a new friend was that she would be laughed at or rudely rejected, but confessed that was fairly unlikely. What was more likely was that her intended friend would either decline or remain neutral to her overture. Although Barbara might look back a year from now with some embarrassment, the rejection certainly wouldn't scar her.

Chipping away at her internal "I'm a friendless loser" *Limiter* voice, she substituted the negative message with an

infinitely more positive one, “I make friends everywhere I go.” With that in mind, Barbara was finally ready to create a new network of women friends, but unsure of how to get started. Since she’d mentioned that she longed to sample more of Chicago’s cultural offerings but was reluctant to do so alone, that seemed as good a place as any to begin. I had Barbara make a list of acquaintances who might share her interest in exploring their city’s rich cultural scene. At first, she caved to the *Immediate Negative Response (INR)*, claiming there was absolutely no one she could ask. After challenging her *Limiter* voice yet again, she came up with a neighbor, her hairdresser, and a couple of co-workers.

Now it was time for some risk-taking action. Using her deep-breathing technique and visualizing a positive outcome, Barbara approached each woman individually, asking if she’d be interested in visiting some Chicago sights with her. Barbara offered to do the legwork of finding art exhibits, concerts, theater openings, and interesting restaurants.

By practicing the conversation beforehand and knowing that if rejected she could handle it, Barbara was able to reach out. She thought she might have one or two takers, which would have been fine, but she was thrilled when all four women accepted her invitation. She promptly planned their first outing to a gallery and nearby wine bar and an institution was born. The last time I talked to Barbara, she and the “Culture Vultures,” as they jokingly called themselves, were planning a trip to Manhattan for some shopping and Broadway shows. Barbara’s willingness to take a modest risk reaped an entire network of female friends.

RISK-TAKER'S TOOL

Reaching Out to Form Fast Friendships

So what's stopping you from reaching out and making new friends? First, identify your sticking point. (Hint: think about your *Limitter* message.) Are you convinced that everyone is too busy? If you're single, have you concluded that married people have no time for single friends? If you're married, do you assume that single people would find you too boring? Whatever your assumption, challenge it. You may be completely wrong and robbing yourself of some great opportunities for fun and friendship.

Then, try one—or all—of the following fast friendship-building techniques.

1. Follow Barbara's example with an interest of your own. Find a group of people (same or mixed gender) who want to create or join a hiking club, wine-tasting class, book club, golf clinic or lecture series. Assume the leadership role, do the legwork, and you'll be surprised how many people are delighted to follow. After all, wouldn't you jump on board if someone presented you with an interesting idea and made it so easy all you had to do was show up?
2. Use your volunteer activities as icebreakers and friendship-builders. I met my good pal Deborah Lotz (rather, she met me since she did the reaching out) because both of us had sons in the high school marching band. After a get-acquainted chat, Deb and I had so much fun talking that we decided to chaperone the band competitions together. It made

“band mom duty” much more enjoyable and allowed us time to build a friendship.

3. Get to know your neighbors with an old-fashioned Fourth of July picnic or barbeque. Or rally your community to start a Neighborhood Watch or put in a new stoplight. You'd be amazed at how many people would love to know their neighbors if they could only figure out how to break the ice. Why not take on the role of community icebreaker and get the block party started?

So what's the common theme in all of these friendship-forming ideas? Each one requires that you get over your resistance to showing your true self, that is, the part of you that you're afraid might appear needy, friendless, awkward, or unlovable. The truth is there are so many people in the same lonely boat, that if you do the reaching out—like Deb did to me—you'll soon have more friends than you have time. That's what I call a high-class problem. So what do you do then? Simple, you get them all together for parties, dinners, walk-a-thons, sporting events or whatever strikes your fancy and suits your schedule.

CLEANING OUT YOUR RELATIONSHIP CLOSET

Sometimes, despite best efforts, friendships go awry. That's when you need to consider cleaning out your relationship closet. Hanging onto destructive or energy-draining people because you're afraid to let go of them is just another form of staying stuck. And you wouldn't hang onto that peasant blouse in the back of your closet, would you?

When I lost the twenty-five pounds I'd been lugging around for a decade, a "friend" pointedly suggested that I not give my old clothes away since I'd probably put the weight back on. I promptly dumped all my fat clothes into a Hefty bag for donation to a homeless shelter. I seriously considered dumping my "friendship" as well. Instead, I took the risk to tell my friend that she'd hurt my feelings when I wanted her support. Her response? That she'd do whatever she could, including joining me on the jogging path, to help me stay in shape. I was so glad I'd taken the risk to share my feelings and salvage the friendship instead of giving it the Hefty bag treatment.

I don't advocate tossing people because they say things you don't want to hear. But I do advocate taking inventory of your relationships to see if you're getting what you want or just hanging on because you don't know how to let go. If a valued friendship veers off-track, see if it can be rehabilitated through honest disclosure and open discussion, like mine was. But if you suspect that a friendship may be terminally toxic, ask yourself these questions:

1. Do you do most of the giving in this relationship and get very little in return?
2. Does this person deplete your energy and drain your spirit?
3. Is your "friend" a *Limitter* rather than a *Liberator*?
4. Would you be relieved if he or she suddenly decided to relocate to some remote region of the planet without cell phone reception or internet access?

If you answered "yes" to two or more questions, it may be time to gracefully extricate yourself from these troublesome

types, or at least minimize the time and energy you spend on them. It might sound harsh, but if your calendar is too booked up for quality time with the people you truly care about, you need to make some hard decisions about who really matters.

Once you've separated the keepers from the non-keepers, you still have to determine if you're spreading yourself too thin. If you're time-starved—and who isn't?—set some new limits for the relationships you want to keep. Make yourself less available for lengthy phone calls, lunch dates, or social events. Tell everyone that they may see less of you for a bit, but that you hope to resurface soon. Ask for their indulgence while you quietly shift the boundaries.

For the non-keepers, be polite but firm in consistently letting them know that you are too focused on family, job, or snowboarding lessons to spend time with them in the foreseeable future. You don't need to tell them you don't value the relationship, there's no point in being unnecessarily cruel. Most people will get the hint after a declined invitation or two but, if not, politely stick to your story. Finally, don't forget that you too are fair game for closet-cleaning by the people in your life, so be sure you're bringing the best you can to every relationship.

OLDIES BUT GOODIES

Forming new friendships doesn't mean that you should ignore your old ones, of course. Old friends deserve at least as much—if not considerably more—attention to keep them vibrant and meaningful. In addition to the health benefits I mentioned above, friends give you a sense of community, a group of people with whom you can share fun and laughter, as well as a support team you can turn to in difficult times. Though it's not

always easy to keep the connection when you're overwhelmed with work and family, it's important to figure out how to make your friends a priority.

After Deb reached out to me, I immediately knew I wanted this smart, funny and talented woman as my friend. But as soon as the marching band season was over, we had no more chaperoning duties together. Deb and I attempted to get together a few times, but scheduling outings for two single mom entrepreneurs proved pretty challenging. Our solution? Walking Wednesdays! Every Wednesday morning, after I drop my younger son at middle school, Deb and I hit the beach path for an hour-long walk. Truthfully, it's more talk than exercise, but it's been a great way to stay connected for nearly two years now with no signs of slowing down.

Here are some other things to keep in mind to help you sustain the flame of friendship:

- ◆ **Find the time.** You may have to get creative, as Deb and I did, but find the time in your life and on your calendar for the friends who count. Go for walks instead of solo gym workouts, schedule weekend getaways for golf or spa treatments, or vacation together with your families. Even just making the time for a quick phone call or cup of coffee can help keep the bond strong.
- ◆ **Drop the scorekeeping.** If you're keeping tabs on who called last or whose turn it is to set up a dinner date, you're missing the point. Forget the nitpicking and focus on the friendship. My friend Wendy would never forget my birthday or come to dinner at my house empty-handed. Yet she totally forgives me for having a brain like a sieve when it comes to dates and details.

- ◆ **Be there for the good, the bad, and the ugly.** It's important to honor your friends by showing up for great occasions like weddings or the birth of a baby, but it's just as important (or maybe even more) to be there when a friend is ill or has lost a family member, significant other, or job.
- ◆ **Don't expect a friend to fill all your needs.** Your friend is not your surrogate parent, so don't expect him or her to be everything to you. It's great to have a best friend with whom you can share a large portion of your life, but it's also O.K. to have different buddies for tennis, shopping, concerts, or going to the movies.

Now, let's turn our attention to a topic that is, arguably, one of the most complex in the human experience. That topic, of course, is love. Just the basic questions like "What is love?"

and "How can I get it and keep it?" are among the most provocative and debated in literature, philosophy, film, and spiritual teachings. I'll do my best to add some thoughts about how you can keep your feet on the ground while falling head over heels in love, and

At the touch of
love, everyone
becomes a poet.

—Plato

shine some light on any limiting assumptions that may be preventing you from living your best love life.

Libby Gill

WHAT'S YOUR LOVE STORY?

Susie and Otto Collins are internationally respected relationship coaches, authors, and lecturers. They also happen to be a happily married couple. They work with people worldwide to keep them out of relationship ruts involving issues like infidelity, jealousy, poor communication, lack of shared commitment, inability to find a suitable partner, the pain of divorce, and much more.

Given the vast range of potential relationship ruts, I was curious to know if they saw any commonality among people who get stuck in their romantic relationships. Their view was surprisingly simple...and incredibly complex. "People get stuck in the wrong story," the dynamic Collins duo told me in no uncertain terms. They went on to illustrate their statement by telling me about a man who'd contacted them because he wanted to "rebuild trust" after his wife had cheated on him. Though the relationship was long over, the man continued to blame his wife for ruining their marriage and refused to let go of the hurt and anger that he felt.

"He's stuck in a story of distrust," Otto said. "Instead of using a painful opportunity to look at his own behavior and how he might have contributed to the collapse of their relationship, he just wanted her to be wrong. We help people look at the payoff they're getting by staying with the wrong story. In his case, he got to be the one who was right."

Of course, being right did nothing to help him move on to find a more suitable partner. Susie explained further that each individual has to understand the commitment they want to make to the relationship and, as a couple, they must agree on that commitment. Using their own marriage as an example, she added, "Our commitment is to stay connected. Some couples'

commitment is to blaming or being right. If there's a problem between Otto and me, I could throw a hissy fit and close down. I could argue and insist on getting my way. Or I could stay open and connected and, because we decided upfront that our commitment is to connection, we would work through the challenge, no matter how difficult."

I raised an issue I'd heard from my friend Gwen, who was insistent that she couldn't look for love, or even date casually, until she lost weight. Otto and Susie explained that she was making the choice to stay stuck in her story. Her story was that she was overweight and therefore unlovable. It was entirely up to her to decide if she wanted to change her story, and if so, to determine one that was better for her.

If Gwen changed her story and began telling herself that she was smart, funny, and had a lot to offer in a relationship (which she did), she'd have to make a conscious decision to then live that story. If she acted on her new belief—her story—then her weight wouldn't be an issue and she'd be open to possibility of love. Susie and Otto Collins believe that we all have the opportunity to write our own story, whether we're looking for a new love or to keep our relationship robust. So start writing your relationship story and make it a bestselling romance!

RISK-TAKER'S TIP Think about your "love story." If you're single, write—or rewrite—your story to make you more available for love. Now, go live that new story. If you're in a relationship, write the best story you can about your romance and then discuss it with your partner. Better yet, ask your partner to write a story, compare notes, and start living your story together!

Libby Gill

PRACTICAL ROMANCE

Several years ago, I became romance road-kill when a guy I was sure was “the one” unceremoniously dumped me via e-mail after a year. As I pondered—O.K. obsessed—about what went wrong, I couldn’t help but wonder how my judgment could have been so far off. Was it because I didn’t really know what I wanted or needed in a relationship? Was it because I hadn’t communicated clearly about my expectations? Did I miss the warning signs that could have told me that this wasn’t going to work?

So I decided to do a relationship postmortem, not just on the e-mail-dumping cad, but on my entire romantic history. My goal was to look for patterns of the past so I could begin to see what had worked—and what hadn’t—in my romantic relationships. By scrutinizing my own behavior and the choices I had made, I hoped to carry that knowledge forward into my next relationship. Otherwise, next time around, I’d risk relying on a swirling concoction of brain chemicals to make me think I was in love.

Dr. Helen Fisher is a renowned biological anthropologist who has spent three decades studying love. She has identified three distinct stages of love—lust, attraction, and attachment—each driven by different hormones. In the initial lust stage, both men and women release estrogen and testosterone, which heightens sexual chemistry and jump-starts attraction.

In the second stage of attraction, three different hormones kick in to give us that familiar head-over-heels feeling. These hormones are: adrenalin, which speeds up your heart rate and causes you to sweat (sounds just like fear, doesn’t it?); dopamine, which affects you much like cocaine by giving you a rush

of pleasurable feelings and sense of well-being; and, finally, serotonin, which makes you feel happy by suppressing anger and depression.

Finally, in the third stage of attachment, both men and women release oxytocin during sexual orgasm. Oxytocin, as you learned earlier when we were discussing friendship, gives you

The Eskimos had 52 names for snow because it was important to them, there ought to be as many for love.

—Margaret Atwood

the warm fuzzies about the other person, which explains why sex can deepen the connection. It doesn't necessarily mean that the connection is lasting, or even appropriate, just that our brains are busy doing what they're supposed to do to make us bond and keep the planet populated.

It's a little disconcerting to realize that physical attraction is really just a chemical cocktail of brain hormones, isn't it?

So how do you compensate for a brain on love or lust override to determine if a relationship is actually a good fit for you? Take a look at the *Romance & Relationship Inventory* below that I designed to answer those questions for myself and others.

RISK-TAKER'S TOOL

Romance & Relationship Inventory

Complete the *Romance & Relationship Inventory* below, regardless of your current relationship status, so you can begin to see the difference between fact and fantasy when picking a romantic partner. Try to take as objective a view as possible

to help you identify the traits that you most desire and those you consider deal-breakers.

Pick two or three *positive* past relationships for your inventory. When I say positive, I mean relationships that had great aspects despite their not lasting. (Although most of us have the nightmare boyfriend/girlfriend in our relationship closet, there's no need to trot them out here.) Read through the following exercise, adapting the questions in whatever ways make them more specific to you. Take plenty of time to reflect on your answers and write out your responses for each relationship.

You can do the exercise separately for each past partner you chose. Or do them at the same time, comparing and contrasting each. Obviously, some areas of the inventory will be more important to you than others, so take that into account as you rate your past partnerships. In other words, if you prize *Emotional Connection* highly but are less concerned with *Lifestyle Choices*, adjust your scores to reflect your values. Score each partner in all five areas on the I-10 scale, I being least positive and 10 being most positive. Then add up your total scores. In an ideal world, your *Practical Romance* partner would a score of 50. But don't be dismayed if your scores are significantly lower. After all, these are the relationships that offered promise, but ultimately didn't work.

If you're currently in a relationship, ask yourself the questions and rate the satisfaction levels you're experiencing right now to determine how well this relationship is working. If your judgment about romantic partners has failed you in the past, the inventory can give you valuable new insights on how to keep it on track.

Please note that I'm writing this from a female point of view and using "he" as the preferred pronoun. It's only for your ease in reading and no gender bias is intended, so guys, don't get your nose out of joint, just substitute "she" where appropriate.

INTELLECTUAL RAPPORT

- ◆ Were you intellectually stimulated by your partner? _____
- ◆ Did he challenge your thinking in positive, but not belittling, ways? _____
- ◆ Did he inspire you to learn? Read? Grow? _____
- ◆ Did the two of you regularly engage in dialogue or debate about ideas, and not just about the people and events of your lives? _____
- ◆ Did you bring out the highest level of intellect in each other, encouraging the passionate pursuit of learning? _____

Rating: _____

EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

- ◆ Did you like to hang out, share activities, and talk with your partner? Did you look forward to swapping stories, insights, and memories with each other? _____
- ◆ Did you trust him? Did you feel he trusted you? _____

- ◆ Did you genuinely like and support each other? Were you comfortable in revealing both the good and not so good parts of you? Did you allow him to do the same, rather than wishing he conformed to some idealized fantasy of the perfect man? _____
- ◆ Was there a sense of deep mutual caring and genuine interest in each other's family, work, spirituality, health, and other major aspects of life? _____
- ◆ Was he your cheerleader, rock, best friend, and partner in crime? _____

Rating: _____

DEPTH OF COMMITMENT

- ◆ Was your partner ready and able to make the kind of commitment you wanted? _____
- ◆ Did you believe he was in the relationship for the long haul? That is, if you were looking for someone with whom you could grow old, did he truly seem like a worthwhile candidate? _____
- ◆ Did he seem like someone who would hang in if you lost a job or had a financial setback? Did you think he would take care of you if you had gotten sick? _____

~YOU UNSTUCK~

- ◆ If you have kids from a prior relationship, did he have the capacity to love your children enough to make them feel valued and cherished (if not necessarily as his own)? _____
- ◆ Was he genuinely loving, or at least tolerant and respectful, of your friends, parents, and siblings? _____

Rating: _____

LIFESTYLE CHOICES

- ◆ Were your daily living choices and rhythms compatible? If he was a homebody and you're a social butterfly, were you comfortable balancing your intro/extrovertedness? _____
- ◆ Did you have fun together? Did you have common passions and pursuits like travel, working out, cooking and entertaining, dance or sports? _____
- ◆ Could you be happy pursuing separate pastimes and allowing each other your interests? _____
- ◆ Did you share, or could you compromise on, an aesthetic sense regarding your surroundings? Could you be comfortable sharing a home? _____

- ◆ Were you able to discuss and determine how you approached finances, together and apart? Were you able to mutually share your thoughts and feelings about food, money, schedules, fun, home, and family? _____

Rating: _____

SEXUAL ATTRACTION

- ◆ Did your partner get you sexually aroused? If sensuality (and not just sexuality) is important to you, did you share that with him? _____
- ◆ Did you find him exciting, no matter his physical appearance? _____
- ◆ Did you think about making love with him? Did you like to give him sexual pleasure? _____
- ◆ Could you talk about sex openly? Could you laugh, cry, and experiment with abandon in the bedroom? _____
- ◆ Did he make you feel that he was attracted to you and that you were exciting to him? Could you see yourself being sexually attracted to this person for the rest of your life (factoring in the inevitable ups and downs of life)? _____

Rating: _____

Now, total your scores for each partnership and then check out the table below to see how the relationships rates.

I-16 BETTER LEFT BEHIND

Think really hard about this relationship and ask yourself whether or not it was worth your investment of time and energy (except as a learning lesson). Check out the individual categories and see what you got from each area. More importantly, consider what you didn't get. Were the positive qualities worth the deficiencies? Did you fall for the fantasy instead of realistically assessing your partner and the relationship?

If this rating is for a current mate, proceed with caution as the two of you get to know each other better. On the other hand, if you've been together for a while, ask yourself if this is as good as it gets. Are you willing to accept that?

I7-33 WORTH THE WORK

It looks like you and your partner had a solid foundation for a successful relationship, but it went off-track somewhere. Were your eyes open to areas of concern or did you ignore the problems and hope the positives could carry the relationship? Do you regret that this relationship ended? Were there things you'd change if you had a chance to do it all over again? How will that knowledge affect future relationships?

If you're rating your current relationship, you've got a lot of compatibility and common ground already. Make sure you periodically assess the five relationship categories to build on what you already have. It might be well worth the work.

34–50 PROMISING PARTNERSHIP

Lucky you! You know that you are capable of attracting a mate who is right for you on many levels. It looks like you found a good partner and that the two of you had a promising relationship. Be sure to take note of the qualities that you valued in your partner and the relationship itself. Now, consider why the partnership didn't last. Was there something you could have done differently? Something you needed from your partner? How can you use this lesson in your next relationship?

If this is a current relationship, you are even luckier! You've found a good mate and now the two of you can continue to build a promising partnership.

RISK REINFORCEMENT: Make a list of all the traits that you require in a partner, such as integrity, sense of humor, financial abundance, or physical health. Now make a list of all the traits that are definite deal-breakers. This could include addictive behaviors, lack of financial security, poor health habits, etc. Use this list as your Practical Romance roadmap to help you objectively assess current and future romantic partners before you get hoodwinked by hormones.

About the Author



A Hollywood entertainment industry veteran, Libby Gill spent fifteen years heading public relations and corporate communications at Universal Studios, Sony Pictures Entertainment, and Turner Broadcasting. Libby was also the PR and branding brain behind the launch of the *Dr. Phil* show.

Libby is now an internationally respected business coach, speaker, and bestselling author. She has shared her success strategies on *The Today Show*, *The Big Idea with Donny Deutsch*, *CNN*, *NPR*, Oprah & Friends Radio Network, *CBS Early Show*, and in *Time Magazine*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *O Magazine*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Self*, and many more.