

Addendum: Message to a Daughter

This book has focused on how partners can revitalize their existing relationships. However, some of the discussion is relevant to how one can go about selecting a mate. If a new partner demonstrates fractured integrity so that future relationship problems are predictable, then it might make sense to reject such a poor gamble. The relevance of this logic was demonstrated when my daughter Heather was twenty years old. She came to me several days after her painful breakup with a second boyfriend in as many years. Heather looked straight into my eyes to underscore the earnestness of what she was about to say.

“Dad?” She said. “Will you teach me to not trust?”

At first I was nonplussed. It seemed a terrible request. Skepticism and cynicism aren't my favorite attributes. But then I got an idea. Perhaps I could interpret her question to be less absolute. Then I might be able to give her a helpful answer. I asked for a few days to think about her question and she agreed. Several days later, I invited her to go out to our favorite Italian restaurant. After our dinner, I handed her a list of five guidelines to help sharpen her caution when selecting her future partner. Since then, a number of my clients have asked me for similar advice. I've given them the same guidelines that I gave her. If you're contemplating a new relationship, they might be useful to you as well.

1. **Quickly leave a new relationship if the person tells even a few convenient lies.** The biggest challenge is to resist your natural desire to minimize the lying. If you don't, it may be the biggest mistake of your life. There's a high probability that the person will betray you in the future because he has insufficient integrity to preserve a secure relationship.
2. **Don't get married unless you and the other person have had three good fights.** Until you see him get angry with you, you really haven't seen his shadow side. If he doesn't risk conflict, he will gradually distance himself out of the relationship. You want a relationship with someone who isn't conflict phobic.

3. **Team up with someone who can balance pleasure and responsibility.** He needs to be comfortable being “healthily selfish.” He needs to love himself as well as you. If he can’t, you will eventually wind up being deprived along with him.

4. **Prioritize character over passion. Select a partner who will “pay the price” for the sake of his integrity.** You want someone who will struggle to be honest and consistent even when it costs him discomfort. Don’t rely on what the person says. Notice what he does when he thinks he’s unobserved. Don’t be seduced just because he is nice to you. There are many nice people who will show strong feelings for you but who will later betray you because they don’t have much character.

5. **Don’t stay with someone who insists you don’t have the right to retreat into your own privacy.** Privacy is an absolute right. If a new partner insists that you shouldn’t “abandon” him when you want to be alone, then he’s not accepting responsibility to stabilize himself like an adult. Adults don’t “abandon” other adults. We don’t have that type of responsibility for each other. We do have the responsibility to not abandon our children. If a partner insists that you shouldn’t “abandon” him, then he really wants a parented relationship and not an adult to adult relationship.