

chapter 5



What? Rules? Seven Ground Rules for a Quick and Painless Connection

***No rules exist, and examples are simply life-savers
answering the appeals of rules making vain
attempts to exist. ~ Andre Breton***

I dated a guy who had an outlook on life distinctly dissimilar from mine—it was one of his attributes, attesting to “opposites attract.” On our second date, he arrived at my door to take me on my first white-water rafting adventure—an inflated raft was tied in his pick-up bed and he was sporting a billed cap inscribed, “What Rules?”

I thought, “Great! He’s on my wavelength. ‘What Rules?’ There ain’t no rules. No limits. Yippie! My kind of man. This is going to be *fun*.” Upon subsequent discussion while navigating the rapids on Oregon’s Deschutes River, he explained that for him, “What Rules?” had a religious connotation, as in “Remember that the Almighty rules.” Oopsy. (Shouldn’t it have read, “Who Rules?”)

Matchmaking would be simple if dating and mating were a science and we could Google the answers. It’s not.

Neither is it magic. It's the most social of games, a dance, a ritual, an art. We are all artists and players of various degrees of talent and skill. Even in this electronically advanced world, we can't buy a handheld GPS tracking device to lead us to our SoulMate. The onus is us.

There is nothing more uncommon than common sense.
~ Frank Lloyd Wright

We are all as unique as our experiences, with our peculiar personal perceptions and emotions that result in our own brand of behavior. If people always did what they knew was best for them, i.e. if we weren't human, if common sense were common, we could skip these rules.

We need to be vulnerable and open if we are to find love. Risky business. Emotionally risky. The game of love, like all games, needs rules. Let these seven simple (albeit not easy), basic Ground Rules (GRs) guide your search. These precepts can be your compass to quickly orientate your search and help you separate fact from fantasy. If followed, they will facilitate a successful, expeditious Internet match.

The GRs are an attempt to control as much of this human, non-scientific process as possible, to establish some order in an otherwise un-orderly, messy task. To predict, to anticipate. To learn from other's mistakes and misadventures. To put you in the driver's seat. To provide a map, a direction, so that this lonely, bumpy drive does not end in a quagmire, prematurely aborted because of

something that could have been avoided. To eliminate wasted efforts and hopefully side step a crushed heart. To make the process as efficient as human undertakings can be. To land in each other's arms ASAP.

Each GR will be fully discussed and illustrated within these pages—to help you hit the ground running, stay on your feet, and cross the finish line relatively unscathed; to illuminate and clarify the process, from the decision to investigate a person of interest to the decision to show up on the 1st Date; and to take you from speculation to *fait accompli*.

Hundreds of thousands of Internet bonding experiences of other Boomers are distilled into these seven GRs. If heeded, these tried-and-true rules of the rough cyber-road will provide a cushion and rewards. Expect consequences, penalties, and costs if you ignore them.

GRs 1 and 7 are *crucial* and *paramount*. GRs 2 through 6 are *secondary* and elaborate on your fundamental mission during the first 90-Days.

Ground Rule 1

The 90/90 Rule: 90 Percent of all Relationships

Don't Last 90-Days

Don't buy your wedding dress or the ring before the first ninety days. Even thinking about "the future" before then is emotionally hazardous. Women intrinsically know that any life event with this much import has a high rate of abortion in the first trimester. Just as with a fetus, a

relationship in the first three months will either take on a life of its own or will expire. In this fragile embryonic phase, the relationship may appear viable, but it requires a healthy dose of Chemistry, hormones, give and take, luck, energy, and mutual nourishment, otherwise it will wither away or miscarry.

During this 90-Day probation period, you will determine if you are on track with Mr. Wonderful or stuck with a 90-Day Wonder. People can erect a facade and pretend to be anyone they want or think you want. It's easy to get duped or deceived. But if you are alert, you can discover 95 percent of all frauds and pretenders within 90-Days. This rule has saved many a heartache, bank account, and hassle, and much of a nonrenewable resource: time. Make it work for you. Keep "I wonder who he will be in ninety days?" in the forefront of your mind so that you don't say, "I wonder how I could have been so wrong?"

It's easy to become your own worst enemy. We all have our romantic Achilles heel, our dating danger zone. I'm not easily or often attracted to the average man. My friends charge that I'm only interested in sophisticated gents not often found in Iowa—gents that aren't the least bit excited by my somewhat edgy, earthy, moxie personality. Since high school, I've been fascinated by the classy scoundrel who is often not that reliable or good for me. I might be highly selective, but I'm also decisive and can get involved quickly. Whether it's genetic or innate, it doesn't always serve me well.

When I finally get a warm, fuzzy feeling, I've learned to bring out the caution sign, shelve the Chemistry, and reach for the rules. The 90/90 GR allows my brain to oversee or overrule my instinctive attraction and gives me time to ascertain reality, to make a judgment based on my past experience and his current behaviors. And to ponder if this is an authentic man or my manufactured mirage.

Cowboy translates: *Step lightly and with caution...don't get your heart in a vice...so to speak...or any other parts of yourself, for that matter...*

Heed this rule. I ignored it when I believed that Mr. Ohio and I were on a bullet train to nirvana. My penalty when the wheels came off? A shattered heart. And a tearful, disparaging year locating the pieces and gluing them back together. Was I fooled or foolish? A little of both. I allowed myself to believe. He believed what he said when he said it. Despite residual, indelible damage, I reassembled a reasonable facsimile of a healthy, hopeful beating heart—with fresh scars—and got back online. I was lucky. Sometimes, all the king's horses and all the king's men can't put a heart together again.

Ground Rule 2

Honesty—The Only Policy

*Truth has no special time of its own. Its hour is now—
always. ~ Albert Schweitzer*

Don't lie. Period. It works against successfully finding your SoulMate. Be honest with yourself and with your Potentials. Be honest early. The longer you wait, the more entwined you become, the more difficult it is to voice truths. Boomers don't have time to waste on false or misleading information. This is a matter of respect for yourself and the others.

Dating may be inherently synonymous with deception and duplicity. But lack of forthrightness carries the danger of unforeseen collateral damage. Bystanders get singed in the backlash. We can never tell how sensitive, vulnerable, or susceptible another person is at any specific time in their life. Prevarication, fabrication, fibbing, fudging, and lying by omission and commission all count as deception and dishonesty.

This isn't easy. Honesty rarely is. It is important to be diplomatically, not brutally, honest. Being open and honest does not mean total transparency, laying bare your soul and all manner of past supposed transgressions. This is not a confessional. It serves no purpose to admit to cheating on a tenth grade math test or having an abortion at eighteen.

It is your responsibility to be forthright with possible DBs and disclose the basic, unchangeable, current issues that will impact a SoulMate. Ultimately you seek intimacy, which demands honesty. After 90-Days, as trust builds, you can work on disclosing soft spots.

I admired a 1st Date who traveled two hours to tell me face-to-face at dinner that he was on dialysis waiting for a

kidney transplant, and the guy who told me on the phone (he planned to travel several days for our 1st Date) that he'd had a recent heart attack, and the one who informed me pre-1st Date that he had genital herpes. These guys gave me important information, and time to digest it and to decide whether it was something I could handle or wanted in my life. I even appreciated, albeit rejected, the guy who disclosed that he was a sexual felon.

Don't expect people to admit to torturing their cats or consistently cheating on their spouses (although some have admitted "straying"). Ferret out those types of bad behavior in your investigation.

Ground Rule 3

Trust, But Verify

Trust everybody, but cut the cards. ~ Finley Peter Dunne

"Trust, but verify" is a President Reagan truism. Never assume. Ask. This is *your* heart on the chopping block. If you don't understand his words or behavior, he's vague, or something rings a bell or nags at your subconscious, rephrase your questions until you get comprehensible answers. But remember, the answer is simply their version of reality—complete with their wishes and their desires—filtered and viewed through the prism of their past and present world.

Distortions, misleading half-truths, and downright perfidy have landed many a man between the sheets. Who

can blame him for wanting to mess with success? Deception might not be conscious or intended, but “all’s fair in love and war” came from somewhere. Most Seekers aren’t sociopaths sans consciences. Some merely wish into the wind, hoping to land on a fertile, vulnerable spot. World-class liars, Lotharios, and blow-hards are easily spotted. The rest reside somewhere between heartless and heartfelt. Do your due diligence.

Reality Check

Intuition is our capacity for direct knowledge, for immediate insight without observation or reason.

~ David G. Myers

Men and women differ. No surprise here. His or her reality is different than yours. Really, there is no “real”—it’s all an illusion. Perspective is mutable, changing radically when viewed from different angles. Perception is reality. His perspective is not always in alignment with your perspective. My perception is my reality.

Dust off your intuition, your sixth sense. Always trust your gut, your bones, or whatever you want to call that deep inner feeling that logs all your past experiences and taps into the power in the universe to protect you.

Ask yourself, “Do I feel good about this, or don’t I?” Intuition is your body’s survival mechanism, a means of taking you away from danger and steering you towards what’s good for you. It is simple, visceral, and comprised

of past experience. The more experience you have, the more you listen to your gut, the more intuition works for you. Don't ignore or fabricate those signals.

Don't second-guess. Don't even first-guess. Be circumspect. Wait. Verify. Discriminate. And yes, judge. *You* will be judged. That is not a dirty word, by the way. "Judgmental" infers "without evidence." Don't make presumptions not in evidence. Get evidence. Evaluate. Make an informed decision. Then, keep a vigilant watch for 90-Days. If it looks, feels, and acts too good to be true, it is. Believe it! Do the Hokey Pokey and turn yourself around.

Pay Attention or Pay the Price

The eye sees only what the mind is prepared to comprehend. ~ Henri Bergson, philosopher

It's easy to become seduced by superficial impressions or physical attributes when they are filtered through your desperate need for him/her to be "the One." We have developed an infinite capacity for self-deception and its first cousin, rationalization. These genetically ingrained human survival traits are part of the defense mechanism that helps us navigate through life, get what we want, and skip harsh realities. Life is easier living with selective hearing and selective sight; but this is not the time for self-delusion. Put it aside.

Inattentional Blindness

Inattentional blindness is the phenomenon of not being able to see things that are actually there. It results from distractions or a lack of an internal frame of reference. Attend. Keep your eyes peeled for flags—pink and red. As in bullfighting, they exist to get your attention. If ignored, you'll get gored.

Watch for waving flags. Put your input receptors on broadband. Play detective. Be alert with eyes wide open for clues. No one can be completely vetted, but if there emerges a preponderance of evidence (if a plethora of pink flags marching in formation, from afar, en masse, becomes red) exit stage left.

These triggers are warning signs or risk symptoms and are indications that some problem may be imminent. You are trying to identify a hazard and, if discovered, to monitor its importance and validity. If your intelligence-gathering finds inconsistencies, *pay attention*. Inconsistencies mean something. Primarily, you seek evidence of baggage too heavy for you to deal with, for something unchangeable that you cannot live with or are unable to tolerate—for Deal Breakers.

Flags are especially important in the early stages, before your attention is blinded by emotions and feelings tangled in a budding relationship. Often huge, blood-red flags flying at full mast go unnoticed or ignored by the denial inherent in the pleasures of new love, enchantment, or lust masquerading as adoration.

Ground Rule 4

Actions Speak Louder Than Words

After all is said and done, more is said than done.

~ Aesop

Take off those rose-colored shades. Seeing might be believing, but our hearts are easily deceived and our sight is selective. This is especially true in Internet relationships that inherently foster fantasy as we rely on a picture and a thousand words before we experience day-to-day behavior. Believe half of what you see, one-fourth of what you read, one-third of what you hear, and much of what you experience.

A book we read, visualize, imagine, and, therefore, personalize is typically better than the movie version. We quixotically hopeful romantics can, and will, read whatever we desire into the words we hear. I am a wordsmith in love with words. I believe in words. We Midwesterners are sincere souls and believe what people say because we say what we mean and mean what we say. Our word is our bond and all that rubbish. That's my reality.

Yet, words *are not* always our friends. Words can be weapons as well as tools, used for good or ill. To entice and intrigue. To deceive. To manipulate. To camouflage, to shield. Promises are only words until backed by actions. Saying it does not make it so.

To seek is to be vulnerable. Beware the charmers, the dreamers, the naïve, and the glib, who suck us in with

pretty phrases and visions of sugarplums dancing in their heads. They will say, “We could...” and “We will...” while painting a pretty picture and theorizing all manner of potential possibilities, if only you were in their life.

Good Intentions Don't Fly

Five birds sit on a telephone wire. Two of them decide to fly south. And that leaves? Three? No. Five. *Deciding* to fly south is not the same as doing it. If a bird really wants to go somewhere, it's got to point itself in the right direction, jump off the wire, and flap its wings. Good intentions aren't good enough. Character and lives are defined not by what we want, say, or think, but by what we do.

Ground Rule 5

Don't Fall in Love with Someone's Potential

We do not see things as they are; we see things
as we are. ~ Talmud

It's dangerous to future-ize. Potential is potent and has its place, but not early in a romance. Believing in someone's *potential* could cause a heart-clogging, heart-stopping, life-wasting catastrophe. Wouldn't it be *lover*-ly if...? He'd be perfect if..., and there was no gravity.

It's difficult to get yourself to that faraway place, Someday Isle. How can you perform alchemy on someone else, transporting them to Someday *He'll*...?

We can change only ourselves, and then only a little—

with much effort. We get him as-is, complete with pre-existing conditions.

Potential is fiction. It does not exist. It's not what *if*, but what *is*. It's not *then*, it's *now*. The power resides in now. Right now he is: unemployed, bankrupt, and belches loudly at dinner parties. Face the facts. Desire won't magically morph his bovine behavior into sophistication.

Past is often prologue to the future. How he was then and how he is now are similar versions of how he will be in the future. Your future. His behavior now, this moment, is who he is. Period. Believe it.

Don't Fall for Eager Reactors

Eager Reactors proclaim before meeting you or getting to know the real you that you are who they have been searching for all their lives. These are pedestal people who date their image of you. These guys are in love with love—they bring expensive candy, flowers, and gifts to a 1st Date who is a fantasy, an illusion, a chimera. They react to who they think you are or wish you'll be. They extrapolate and fantasize a person using your photo and profile and faulty reasoning: "If she's this, than surely she must be this." It's devaluing and dangerous. Before 90-Days, if he is besotted, he has fallen for someone he thinks you are, not the richly fallible human you actually are.

Be skeptical of guys who scatter about endearing terms and pet names before they're earned, who constantly talk romantically or flirtatiously. These quick-to-connect

creatures often suffer from EBW—eagerness beyond willingness. They engage before knowing what is expected and, once that is discovered, they offer a litany of excuses or silently disappear.

Full-out enthusiasm and interest in you is heady stuff. It's flattering. Of course we're magnetic and loveable. But he hasn't had time to know you. Manufactured fantasy means nada. Don't be a willing repository of his fantasizing, speculation, hopes, and dreams. His dream, if believed, could be your nightmare.

It takes time together to glean the essence of another person, to experience his behavior and match it to his words, to determine if he resembles his self-profile. Men, exhibiting a form of amnesia, are notorious for falling quickly for a woman and then unexpectedly getting clarity. Suddenly, without notice or explanation, all previous words, thoughts, and deeds (and sometimes gifts) are miraculously rescinded.

This phenomenon is the law of diminishing ardor. Ardor—and the sweet words that accompany it—decreases exponentially from the initial reading of your profile and rarely has the strength to last three months. What you get, sense, observe, and experience in the beginning may be wondrous. But it is not necessarily the truth. After 90-Days, if there is anyone you recognize from his profile standing in front of you, that's the reality you can begin to deal with.

Ground Rule 6

There Is Always More to the Story

People don't lead with their whole truth.
~ Oprah Winfrey

There is always more they can't or won't tell you. More they aren't aware of. More that has transpired. More you'll never know. More to come. Your interactions with this person are only the tip of an iceberg of history, baggage, personality, and character.

Nothing happened or happens in a vacuum. There is always the other point of view, the other experience. Everything is subjective. Which means—drum roll please—*it's up to you*. Take responsibility for your own investigation, because you will bear the repercussions of your poorly considered or uninformed decisions and choices. But—and this is the sweet carrot—if you persist, engage, deliberate, and seriously consider these GRs, you get to blissfully frolic in the spoils. And it could be in Xanadu.

Ground Rule 7

Timing Is Everything

Bottom line: It's all about timing. *Life* is all about timing. Timing occurs when, just for this instant, this moment in time, his readiness, his reality, and his life stage somehow, magically, miraculously match yours. Then it's either spontaneous combustion or mass destruction, depending on how well

you did your homework and packed your parachute.

TotalSum (57) from Iowa, one of my 1st Dates, wrote about timing: *If you are lucky enough to be in the same town, the same restaurant, in the next booth overhearing her as she describes her feelings to her girlfriend, and you have not just been dumped on by your last first date so your feelings are not totally raw...*

I encountered two near-miss surrealistic SoulMates. Although we enjoyed an incendiary match with the perfect portions of compatibility and Chemistry, the relationships didn't cement. They were merely transitory encounters, illusive connections. We were passers-by in the galaxy. I was in position and ready. They were not. My reality said, "This can work. This is wonderful. I'm in heaven." And his said, "This is wonderful, this is heaven." And, within 90-Days, his reality said, "I can't do this because..."

The timing was off. Which means that while he may initially have the desire, he will not, *cannot*, put in the effort it takes for this relationship to progress, to flower, to stick. Readiness is a DB that is often and easily overlooked—dismissed or ignored until crunch time. By the way, that is the sound of your crushing heart.

There is no fighting timing.

Throughout this book, I refer to and illustrate these seven simple GRs. For now, memorize, memorize, memorize. Bookmark, photocopy, tear out and pocket or paste them on your computer screen. Revisit them often during the crucial first 90-Days.