



Love

Looking for love in all the right places: Authors share dating and relationship tips

BY JOSEPH PEÑA, EDITOR

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Logging on to find “love” (or the next best thing)?

Constantly picking apart men and trying to find “the one”?

Considering a romp in the sack to wrap up your first date?

You may want to re-examine your approach to meeting and dating men – and *The 7-Day Dating and Relationship Plan for Gay Men* is an essential tool along the way.

Grant Wheaton, a longtime professional matchmaker and owner of ManMate, a matchmaking service in New York City, and his partner Dennis Courtney, have compiled seven basic principles to get you on the road to happier, more fulfilling relationships.

On a trip out West, Wheaton and Courtney stopped in San Diego to talk with the *Gay & Lesbian Times*. You could say Wheaton – who’s owned ManMate for more than two decades and has served more than 5,000 clients with it and his Dinners for 8 dinner parties – knows a little about looking for love and helping launch successful relationships. Along with Courtney, the couple compiled their seven tips in *The 7-Day Dating and Relationship Plan for Gay Men* after recognizing patterns among their clients.

Wheaton and Courtney dished on dating, relationships and sex – and why there may not be just one man for you. There may be many!

***Gay & Lesbian Times*: How’d you develop the concept for ManMate and when did you begin compiling the stories and tips you have in the book?**

Grant Wheaton: One of my strong motivations was I was single myself and I figured there had to be a better way to date – not through phone lines or clubs and bars or personal ads in local papers. The Internet certainly hadn’t come along, and I wondered whether there was a group of

men who really also prioritized relationships, even though, at the time, successful gay relationships were less visible in society and men were struggling to find the tools to build a relationship. They were less equipped to form a relationship, which has gotten better over the years, but it's still an ongoing challenge.

In New York, there were so many gay men looking for something; as the advent of the AIDS crisis came along, hooking up every single night in a bar became a health issue, not just a moral issue. And men were seeking ways to date in a different manner. When we came along, it was like manna from heaven. Men – HIV-positive men and HIV-negative men – had a feeling their time may be limited and they wanted to share their lives with someone for the length they had left. Men who were negative were motivated from that standpoint to seek something more substantial.

In the first five years I focused on getting the business going in tandem with my acting career. There were real challenges. I'd never run my own business. I was working with a therapist and we were doing workshops together on dating; really successful day or seasonal workshops. After about two years, I started doing them on my own and I started writing an advice column in a New York-based magazine. Right around that time, in the mid-'90s, I was writing columns and I saw patterns recurring with my clients, and I thought, all this needs to be condensed into a book. I was very interested in collaborating with a friend of mine, who is now my financial adviser. But, my nine-year relationship ended about that time and it became very challenging for me; the last thing I wanted to do was write a book on how to create a successful relationship. It was put on hold, and then Dennis and I met in 2000. Actually, Aug. 8, 2008 – 08-08-08 – was our eight year anniversary. After Dennis and I met and became involved I began entertaining the idea of the book again, and I was approached by a previous client who worked in publishing. We thought, "Well Dennis and I complement each other so well – what if we wrote this together?" Our sensibilities are very similar, and I have the wealth of stories and situations, and he helped create the voice of the book. The fact that we were approached by a publisher, and we got published, we just thought, "Is this for real?"

GLT: What is one of the most important tips you share in the book?

GW: One of the key elements – if not the most key element – in dating is extending and opening up. Once you find a man to start building your life with and you continue on into a relationship, you may ride the feelings of passion, connection and sexual chemistry for a while before things become less exciting. You often rationalize, "He's simply not the right man," and go on to greener pastures – but relationships are not all about the honeymoon. There is so much outside of having an incredibly hot time in bed. Gay men, in general, are not encouraged to develop meaningful connections with one another; gay men, as successful as they may be – they have a great job, a great house, a great body – in terms of dating and relationship skills, are still back in junior high school. All the externals – the sensual aspects of a relationship and physical attraction

– are an important component, but how your personalities mesh and you communicate in general are more important. Isn't the book ultimately about getting yourself prepared?

GLT: How has the internet changed dating and matchmaking?

GW: The very accessibility of the Internet and the options of hooking up have made men approach one another as a bit more disposable. Someone can meet up with a man, and then disappear or evaporate – the “on to the next” mentality. The Internet has become a numbers game; some think, “If I meet all these scores of men, one of them has got to be the one who pulls it all into place,” and they've stopped considering what they bring to the table that may increase their chances at being in a relationship. A lot of gay men take that mentality. Dating is about human face time – the Internet is not human face time. You have to make the commitment to making it happen. It's too easy to hurt people or write them off. It's easy to be more insensitive on the Internet.

Dennis Courtney: What seems to be connecting is actually disconnecting – it's electronically connecting. Let's face it: it's objectifying men ultimately for sex. What else are you doing but objectifying one another for the purpose of sexual conquests or hookups? I really do think sex changes things. A lot of men sabotage the possibilities they might have with a viable partner by jumping right into bed with them.

GLT: Do you believe that there is one person out there for everyone?

GW: I am not someone who thinks there is only one man on this earth that is put here for each man. You really have to be proactive, putting yourself out there and extending yourself to make a relationship work. Certainly there are going to be other candidates in the world for you, but you make a choice in a sense. You're not fated to find your way; that kind of fairy tale mentality puts a lot of pressure on any person. You start looking for perfection, and you make a mental checklist of things “the one” has to have – and if there's only one, they better fill in a lot of blanks. They have to have the perfect body, like what you like, a good income, the right age – my god, talk about driving yourself crazy. There is such scarcity in the idea that there is only “one.” You meet someone you see as a viable possibility and there's a sense of chemistry or love, and you start building your lives together. Gradually, with all the wonderful day-to-day things that happen, there are going to be potholes in any relationship. I try to really remind my clients that relationships aren't perfect, and they're really the ones putting the most pressure on themselves.

DC: In that moment, in that time period, it certainly feels that way – “I have never met a person like this in my life and I think I ever will again.” I don't necessarily think that means you can't find someone else to feel a different kind of chemistry with, or share a visceral connection with.

GW: You waste so much wonderful time not being present and thinking of all the amazing you've lost or are missing out on. You may have several hundred relationships – and you have to think, this is the one for me until it's not.

GLT: Do you have any favorite stories that have come out of your matchmaking?

GW: Jim from Atlanta; he's mentioned in the book. He made my year. When I heard from Jim, who started using ManMate when it was new, only a year or two in existence, I introduced Jim to Marty, and they stayed passionately in love for the next 18 years, until Marty died of AIDS. Jim wanted to get in touch with me to tell me how wonderful their life had been together and how much Marty was the love of his life. They met at a time when ManMate was so new and they navigated so much of the AIDS crisis together and weathered all the personal challenges. They really were lifelong mates.

One of the really fulfilling things about what I do is there are two people who wouldn't have likely met in the course of their lives, and month to month, year to year they build something that you launched – you created a situation for the two of them to start an incredible journey.