

FINDING LOVE  
Why,  
we're  
*too*  
fussy

Is there really a man drought? Or are we too picky? As modern-day matchmakers step into the breach, **Jordan Baker** reports from the front line.

Matchmaker Trudy Gilbert says while she is here to introduce people, success is due to the individuals themselves.



**P**LAYING CUPID IS A tricky business, as Mary Mitchell can attest. A client sued the Irish matchmaker for “negligence, breach of duty and fraudulent misrepresentation” after she failed to find love, complaining one man was too shy, the second was too rude and a third too desperate – while a fourth attempted to kiss her in a public car park.

The client lost after a judge found the men were “within her range of compatibility”, but that was enough to prompt Mary to quit matchmaking for the less thorny ground of speed-dating.

As Mary’s experience shows, those in the business of creating love carry a heavy responsibility. They are the custodians of our most private hopes, fears and confidences. They battle bad manners, halitosis and frumpy outfits.

And, in perhaps their greatest challenge, they grapple with the increasingly lofty expectations of modern singles, who, they say, feel entitled to meet someone tall, dark, handsome and rich, even if they are short, pale, homely and poor.

Playing Cupid might be frustrating and rewarding, but all agree it is not to be taken lightly.

The art of matchmaking is as old as man’s inability to find a suitable mate. The popularity of online dating was predicted to spell its end, but in fact the opposite has happened.

While dating websites have taken the stigma out of looking for love, they have also proved time-consuming, risky and unreliable. Those burned by the experience are turning to a more tailored service, in which they can trust their hearts to a matchmaker with a proven knack for these things.

“Matchmakers have a skill that sometimes you don’t have because you are too close,” says long-time matchmaker Michelle Lewis, who now runs



## WHERE WOMEN GO WRONG IN THE DATING GAME

- Arriving at dates in work/mother mode. Try to take a break before you arrive for the date or change outfits so you don’t take the day with you.
- Holding high expectations. Unrealistic expectations will only end in disappointment.
- Having specific “shopping lists” about what you’re looking for in a partner. Ask yourself how lists are going to make a relationship work.
- Failing to look at what you’re taking to the table. What needs of your own are you expecting him to meet and are you being realistic about that?
- Failing to understand that, rightly or wrongly, men judge women on their sexual behaviour.
- Demanding constant proof of his affection. Men don’t function like women and if he doesn’t call every day, it’s not a reflection on how much he cares or doesn’t care about you.

Source: Yvonne Allen & Associates.

J-Junction, a not-for-profit introduction agency for the Jewish community.

In Australia, there are more than 300 introduction agencies listed in the *White Pages*, matching everyone from Christians to seniors. Anyone can bring people together, but there’s a skill to doing it well. “It’s just an instinct,” says Trudy Gilbert, who owns Elite Introductions. “You look at what they’re saying, what they’re not saying, their body language. We look at energy levels, hobbies – what drives them? For a lot of people, it’s growing and learning; they love challenges.”

There are agencies for every walk of life. Blonde, glamorous Tracey Langdon began her Gold Coast agency, The Millionaires Club, when she noticed how many of her wealthy friends were single. She only accepts people with a “net worth” of \$5 million or more (although she is about to drop that to \$1 million). Her clients go on lavish dates.

“We’ll fly girls up to Hamilton Island and go boating for the weekend,” she says. “The overall glamour of the company attracts them.”

Even for the super wealthy, finding love can be tough. “Millionaires get disappointed, like everyone else in life,” says Tracey, who has dated wealthy men herself. They face added dangers, whether it is being targeted for their money or judged because they earned their fortune in mining and don’t fit the stereotype of a martini-sipping mogul. “Non-millionaires have an expectation of what a millionaire is like that is unrealistic,” she says. “They think they should all be sophisticated. Millionaires are normal, everyday guys – they’ve just got a lot of money.”

Trudy Gilbert’s Elite Introductions is slightly more inclusive – it accepts professionals or business owners. “[My clients are] very much at the top of their game,” says Trudy, who “just fell into” matchmaking. “They’re highly eligible and they have trouble meeting someone else who is also eligible.”



Sixty-three per cent of her members end up in a relationship, Trudy says, and the vast majority go on second dates. She is responsible for eight weddings and a baby in the past six years. Yet, she says, a matchmaker is only so powerful – they can lead a horse to water, or, in this case, to dinner, but they can't make it drink.

"In a lot of ways, success is really due to the person," she says. "My responsibility is to put people in front of them. They have to get into a relationship."

Matchmakers do suffer a backlash from disappointed daters, admits Tracey Langdon, who is thinking of putting a no-blame clause in her contracts. "Someone else's emotional

response to them is not my responsibility. I am not God. I've done my best to bring those people together. I don't have a magic wand," she says.

Some services go beyond simply putting like-minded people together. Yvonne Allen owns the longest running introduction agency in Australia, Yvonne Allen & Associates, founded in 1976, but styles herself more as a "human relations consultant". She aims to not only match suitable men and women, but to help them decide what they want in a companion – not just in terms of hobbies or fitness regimens, but also in their attitudes to things such as spirituality, gender roles and money.

If they see eye to eye on these things and can let go of fussy wish-lists about looks or jobs, their relationships are more likely to last, Yvonne says. "Even today, the underlying premise is stop and look at yourself," she says. "We talk to them about the core criteria that matter. We seek right from the outset to get across that it takes more than the wonderful initial boost of chemistry."

Some say matchmaking is a gift, some say it can be learned. Yet, in practical terms, the most important tool is a thick black book, full of as many men as women seeking a match. There is a lid for every pot, matchmakers say, but



## MATCHMAKING IS NOT JUST ABOUT MATCHING – SOMETIMES IT'S ABOUT DIAGNOSING DATING PROBLEMS.

most people need to try a few before they find the right one.

From there, techniques differ. Irish matchmaker Willie Daly, whose father and grandfather were also matchmakers, keeps detailed notes of each client in a sheaf of ragged papers tied with a pyjama cord. He records as much as he can about appearance, jobs and personality, and asks each what they want in a mate. "The real analysis goes on in my brain, in my soul, as I think about two people I have come across separately and imagine them spending time together," he wrote in his autobiography.

Like Yvonne Allen, Michelle Lewis encourages her clients to look into themselves first.

"I want to understand patterns in their relationships, how they've chosen the same type of partner in the past and had the same outcome," she says. This helps distil what they want in the future and once that is clear, Michelle pulls out the database.

Her starting point is shared values, but there's only so much you can do

on paper. "There's an instinct to it," she says. "You have to get a feel for the people you are working with."

Matchmaking is not just about matching – sometimes it's about diagnosing dating problems. Some don't realise their grooming, or lack thereof, is holding them back. Others have bad manners. Some talk about their ex too much, or are rude to waiters. "One [client] streamrolls people," says Tracey Langdon. "He doesn't even try to get to know them. I've had to address that." If someone was rude, lecherous or messy on a date organised by Trudy Gilbert, she would let them know. "I tell them tactfully, but it's in their best interests," she says. "I don't

feel any awkwardness bringing it up – they need to know."

Yet in the world of modern dating, the biggest problem of all, matchmakers say, is unrealistic expectations, especially among women. Romantic books and films have encouraged women to believe they are entitled to Mr Perfect and to knock back kind, suitable chaps while they wait to be dazzled.

"[Some women say,] 'He's got to be tall, he's got to be this, he's got to be that,'" says Yvonne Allen. "A lot of women who are really lonely are lonely because of how they think they should be. We had a woman recently, 46, demanding to meet a man who wants children, not realising a man who wants to have children is not going to want to meet a 46-year-old."

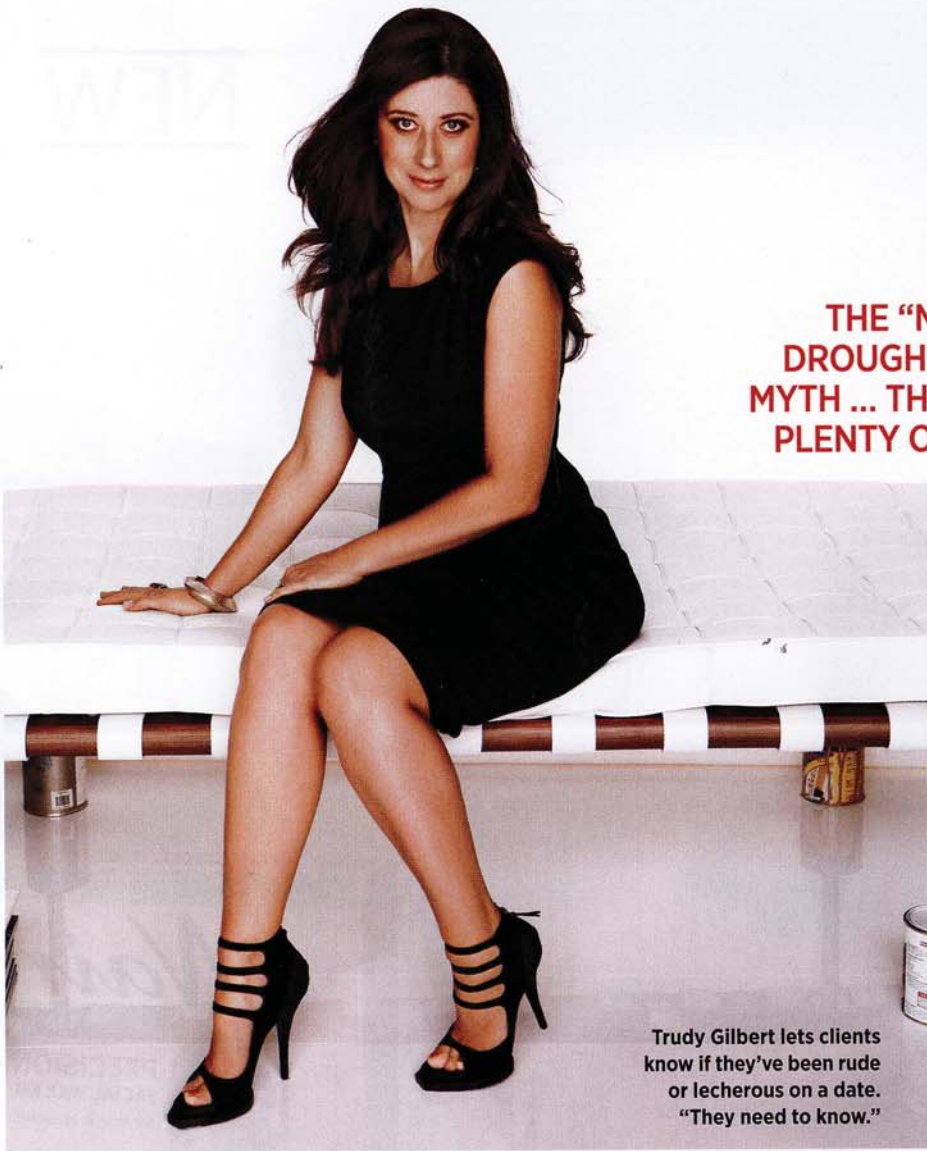
Michelle Lewis agrees. "Some say, 'They have to live in a certain area of Sydney, they have to be a banker and they must like cricket.' Far too much emphasis is placed on what they want and not enough emphasis is placed on what they themselves offer."

Readjusting people's expectations requires diplomacy, which is one of the reasons matchmaking is a challenge. ➤





**THE "MAN DROUGHT" IS A MYTH ... THERE ARE PLENTY OF MEN.**



Trudy Gilbert lets clients know if they've been rude or lecherous on a date. "They need to know."

"There's a need for ethics, for protecting the confidentiality of clients and so on," says Yvonne. "Increasingly, we must be there to provide support. It's a business that has huge pressure for those genuinely seeking to work effectively. Anybody who is successful in this field has to be aware that it's not just boy meets girl – you've got lives at stake, you've got the potential to have children, you've got a 50 per cent divorce rate."

Yvonne is particularly worried that women are sabotaging themselves in their dating behaviour. They carry the assertiveness and perfectionism required in their working lives into their dating lives and that is a mistake.

"Women are losing the skills of attracting and keeping love," she says. "I think we've taken on a Maggie Thatcher-style model in terms of doing things like a man and beating them at their own game. With the focus on that,

we've often not tended to the feminine aspects. Certainly, the way we operate as men and women has changed and our expectations are so high ... there could be the ideal man in front of them and they're not recognising him."

A good agency will only take on clients they can help. "I'd have enormous difficulty taking on someone who was very religious and I do have members saying they don't want to meet anyone who is overweight," Trudy Gilbert says.

Opinions differ about whether the supply of men is a problem. Trudy says the "man drought" is a myth and there are plenty of men for the women on her books. "I think it's a conspiracy by men to make themselves feel like they are more of an exclusive product."

Yvonne Allen disagrees. "The problem is continually reaching appropriate men," she says. "Many more women are on the lookout. Men are not likely to be as proactive."

Established matchmakers also worry about the lack of regulation in the industry. People looking for love are highly vulnerable and can be easily manipulated. Some bogus agencies have been shut down and taken to court. "When I was in recruitment, I had to be licensed," says Michelle Lewis. "Yet anyone can hang a shingle on the door and say, 'I'm a matchmaker'."

In fact, Michelle is so concerned about the state of the industry, she is thinking of developing a matchmaker training program. She would teach trainee Cupids to trust their instincts, hone their listening skills and identify bad habits their clients have developed in the past. She'll stress the importance of being direct and of asking them to think about what they really want in a partner.

The good news in all this is that there is an army of people committed to helping Australians of all ages, postcodes and bank balances diagnose their dating problems and find love. There is a matchmaker – and hopefully a match – for everyone. "I believe in the system," says Michelle. "Someone who is a matchmaker, who has the right attitude about what they're doing, can make a huge difference." ■

**TOP DATING DON'TS**

- Don't reveal everything about yourself on the first date. First dates are like interviews – a controlled release of information where you paint yourself in a favourable light. Trudy Gilbert is not saying to lie, but to limit what you reveal. Create an air of mystery so he will want to see you again.
  - Don't talk about your ex. Quite simply, this can be an immediate turn-off and a total mood kill.
  - Don't go to a movie. Sitting together for two hours in the dark where you don't talk is not a good first date choice. Instead, try going out for a drink or a casual dinner which creates a relaxing, no-pressure environment to get to know each other.
- Source: Matchmaker Trudy Gilbert at [eliteintroductions.rtrk.com.au](http://eliteintroductions.rtrk.com.au).

TRUDY WEARS LAURA ASHLEY DRESS, KERRY ROCKS RING AND BANGLE AND GIVENCHY SHOES FROM DIO DATO. REPLICAS BY VAN DER ROHE BARCELONA ANILINE LEATHER DAYBED FROM MATTLATT.COM.AU.