

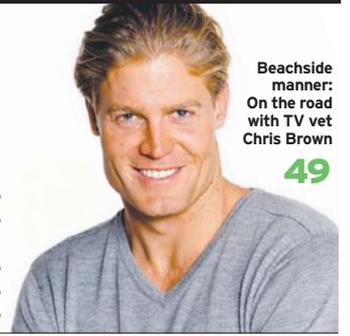


CareerOne

Fit for it 48
Swans conditioning coach on keeping up

By degrees 49
Graduate recruitment strong despite downturn

Casual/Part-time	105
Employment Services ...	105
Positions Vacant	101
Self Employment	105
Training	105
Work wanted	105



Beachside manner:
On the road with TV vet Chris Brown
49

A helping hand for Cupid

Finding true love can require a little guidance, writes **Nidhi Prakash**

MATCHMAKER, relationship counsellor and friend all in one, Trudy Gilbert says she thrives on helping people make connections. She set up her dating agency, Elite Introductions, more than three years ago but was bringing people together for years before that.

"It's something that's just kind of fallen into my lap. Through experience I know I'm very suited to it through my character. Because I'm a people person I know how to understand who they are and what they want and how to guide them and advise them," says Gilbert.

She handles more than 800 clients through her Sydney office, with five staff to help out.

"I started on my own, and then I hired my first employee and it just grows from there. I worked from home for the first six months, and then I moved into the city," she says.

Gilbert says some clients are corporate CEOs and media personalities who rely on her to protect their confidentiality and give them advice they can't seek anywhere else.

"There is a lot of counselling and advice and guidance that you need to give to people, because sometimes you might be the only person they talk to about it. They might not have someone they want to or can talk to, especially some of the CEOs that I have. I'm like their big sister," she says.

Counselling is a big part of the equation, she says, as people need guidance and support throughout the process of finding a partner and then often also through the relationship.

"I give relationship advice to our members who are already in relationships. It's not just for those who are in the early stages. I'm there the whole time. It's fantastic," says Gilbert.

Gilbert's background, having studied psychology and sociology at university, gives her an insight into people's needs and emotional states, which also helps her understand how people interact.

"Just being a very good people person and understanding about how people connect, what makes them click, and how to make a connection easier helps as well," she says.

Watching couples get together and stay together is a highlight of Gilbert's work.

She says the hardest part of her job is that she can't help everyone.

"If we don't have the right people, we say now is not the right time. We won't take people on unless we know we have matches for them," she says.

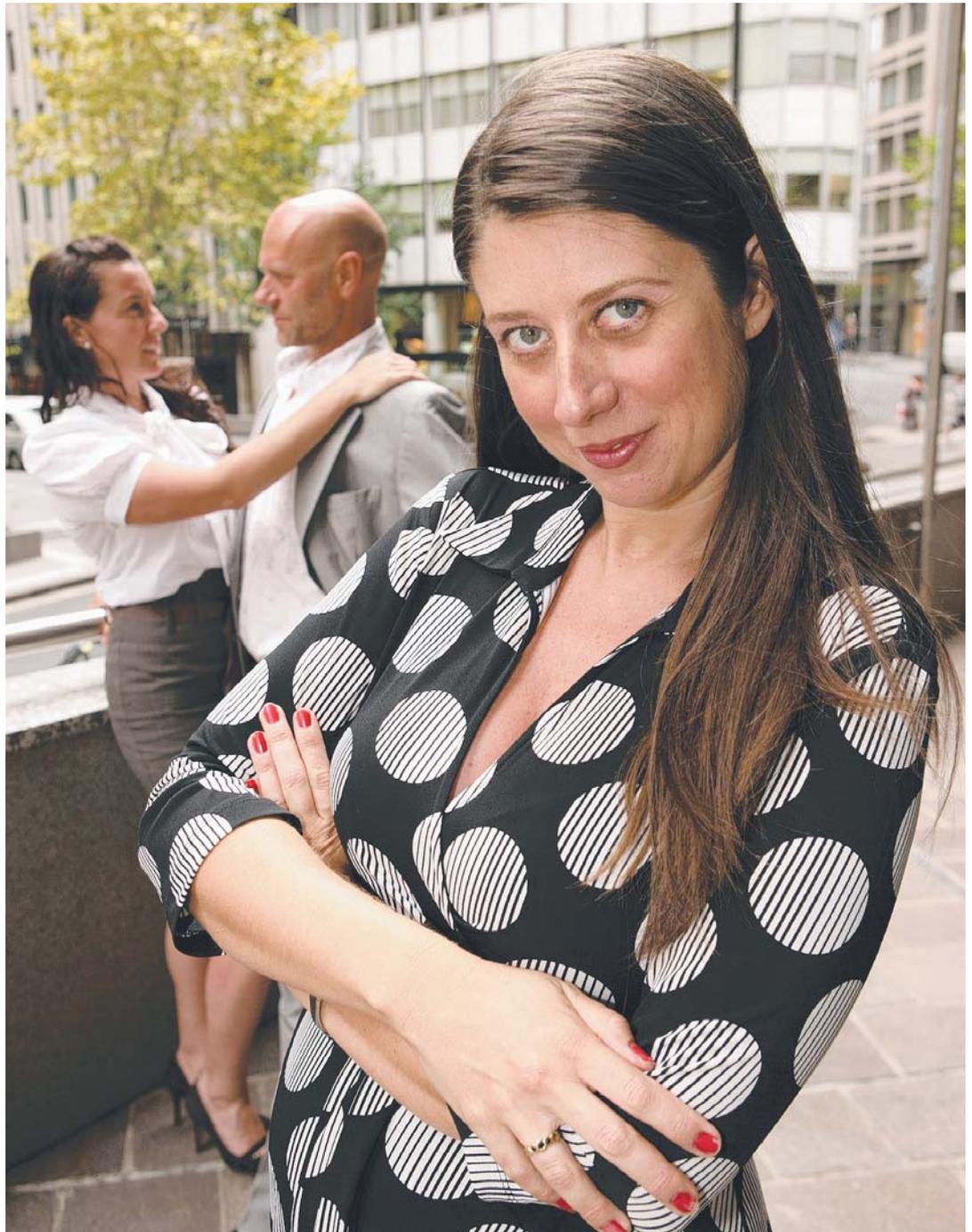
Gilbert's tip for singles this Valentine's Day is to seize the moment.

"Do something, don't just procrastinate about finding someone, make the time to do something. Get out there more often," she says.

"I think it's very easy to let other things pile on top, it's very easy for you to ignore that this should be important to you."

She says couples should take the day as an opportunity to express their appreciation for each other in thoughtful ways.

"Spoil each other. Let each other know how much you appreciate each other and that can be by doing some of the simple things," says Gilbert. "But don't just do the standard flowers and dinner. It's good to be original, it means there's more thought put into it."



Lonely hearts: Elite Introductions founder Trudy Gilbert runs a matchmaking service for corporate clients

Picture: John Fotiadis

How to be a matchmaker, page 48

Inside: Special report on courses in focus and careers in trades and services