

A Dozen Ways to Get to Know Your Real Partner

The Signs Are All Around You

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In my line of work -- family law -- I often hear the same old refrain when a client explains to me why he/she splits from a significant other. It goes like this: "I guess I didn't really know my partner after all." You might ask: How could that be? How could you have an intimate relationship with someone only to wake up one day to find out that the person you fell in love with is not the person he/she turned out to be? I believe there are at least a dozen ways to know who someone really is -- indicators -- and if we do an inventory early on, we might stand a better chance of getting to know the real person before we fully commit. The following "observance" suggestions are important ones to make in the early stages of any relationship because each offers insight into habits, patterns, and behaviors. As you ponder these observations, know that there is no right or wrong; it's a matter of acceptance. Sometimes we have to accept quirks and differences as part of the give-and-take process. As you do your assessment, however, the goal is to decide

whether or not you can live with or without your real partner.

Here are the dozen indicators:

- 1. Protocol: First or Second?** Whether it's walking through a door, ordering dinner, or taking a bite out of the freshly baked cookies you have made together, if your partner always has to go first this could indicate self-centeredness. Are you willing to always be the giver?
- 2. Politics: Liberal or Conservative?** How your partner views what is right or wrong in a political sense tells you a lot about his/her deep inner beliefs about society, and ultimately, the way he/she will approach your relationship issues. Will his/her views cause a rift in your relationship?
- 3. Television: Sitcoms or News?** If your partner's tendency is to watch "escape" TV programs versus "newsy/event" oriented ones, you can learn a lot about one's intellect. Do you want a mate who can keep up with your every day interest in what is going on in the world or a person you can run away with to avoid the world we live in?
- 4. Money: Flash or Stash?** If your partner throws money around while dating, he/she might well be reckless with your joint finances when you move in together. Do you want to hook up with a tightwad or splurger?
- 5. Stress: Freak or Peak?** Under pressure, does he/she go to pieces or rise to the top of his/her game? If the answer is the former, every minor incident in your relationship might become a crisis. Do you like a lot of drama?
- 6. Conversation: About You or Your Partner?** As you first get to know each other does he always talk about himself/herself first or you? If your partner is usually the topic priority do not expect that to change. Can you subordinate yourself to the world revolving around him/her?
- 7. Pets: Warm or Aloof?** Believe it or not, the way in which your partner treats animals will not be dissimilar to how he/she treats your children. How do you want him/her to treat your loved ones?
- 8. Communication: Listens or Ignores?** If you have something you want to talk about and he/she tunes you out as a general rule, can you cope?
- 9. Strangers: Kind or Rude?** How your partner treats those they do not know (waiters, grocery clerks) often reflects on how your partner will treat people in general, including you, shortly after the glow wears off.
- 10. Priorities: Family or Work?** You can tell almost immediately where a person's preferences lie in terms of what comes first (a family member's illness or a business trip) by the choices your partner makes when faced with an "either/or" situation. Do you care if your partner leaves on the next plane to present the such-and-such report if you or the kids have pneumonia?
- 11. Appearance: Fat or Fit?** How your partner regards his/her appearance screams loudly about his/her sense of self-esteem. Those who eat sensibly, workout reasonably, and who take pride in their appearance are the ones who have a great sense of self. Does he/she really have self-confidence or might it be a front?
- 12. Faith: Strong or Weak?** If you want a peek at his/her soul, learn more about his spirituality, or lack of it. What your partner believes deep down is often what shapes the way in which he/she conducts his day-to-day affairs. What are your mate's "words to live by?"

