

ASK THE COACH

Women's Relationship Questions Answered

By Karen Jones

The Heart Matters

www.TheHeartMatters.com

Karen@TheHeartMatters.com

(978) 557-9993

Table of Contents

Introduction

The Singles Section The story of Katherine How do you stay motivated and positive when dating? I need to feel an attraction to a man – am I being too picky? How do I fight the “He’s too good for me” feeling when I meet a great guy? How do I know if I’m ready to be dating for marriage? How can I flirt effectively, without sending the wrong message? How do I change old (bad) habits? How do I handle a man that sends mixed signals? How can I get out there and date when I’m so overweight? How do I give myself permission to be all of me, in the moment, in relationships? How can I experience more success with online dating? How can I free myself from my ex? How can I get a man I’ve just started dating to show more interest in me? It took him two weeks to call me again – should I blow him off? Why do men get close, and then pull away?

The Involved/Married Section How do I know (really) if and when I can trust this guy?

How long should you wait for a man to commit? How can I tell if I married the wrong man? How do I let my husband take over being the provider? How do I get my husband to stop spending time with his new gal-pal?

How can I get my husband to change the way he’s being with our daughter?

How can I stay soft and vulnerable in the face of anger, disdain or even indifference?

How can I keep the excitement (passion) going in my marriage?

How can I get my husband to engage in more physical intimacy?

How can I get my husband to be more romantic?

How can I get both me and my husband on the same page sexually?

How can I get my husband to get motivated to fix the problem he has with work?

How do you handle your man doing something that you don't agree with, either

morally or legally?

How can I hang in there, and not nag, when my man goes into "his cave"?

How can you see the best in your partner when you feel he has disappointed you?

How can I get through to my fiancée that he's too involved with his family?

How can I handle my anger and jealousy when my husband is around his ex-wife?

Why is my boyfriend buying gifts for his ex-wife?

Finally...

Recommended Reading List

Introduction

Hello!

I'm so pleased to share this compilation of "Ask the Coach" newsletters with you. They are filled with many of the most pressing questions that women have asked me over the last two years about relating to men. Whether you are single and navigating the dating world, or, in a serious relationship and navigating the path of commitment, you'll undoubtedly find these topics interesting and relevant - either now, or in the future.

This book is organized so that you can go right to the area that fits where you are (single or involved/married) or hop around to what appeals to you in the moment. Each woman's question deals with some aspect of relating to men, and is followed by my in-depth answer.

Although the questions are different, you are going to find several themes that weave through many of the answers. As Tony Robbins says, "Repetition is the mother of skill." It is my intention that what you find in these pages will help you to have the best possible attitude about, and perception of, your relationship with the man in your life, or, with the

men you are meeting on the path to committed relationship. I believe that knowing yourself, knowing what you really want in life, and having a really good attitude about men goes far in creating the life of your dreams.

I trust that this information will help you to reach a level of success in love that you, and all of us, deserve.

Wishing you great love in your life,

Karen Jones

The Single Section

THE STORY OF KATHERINE

This first item isn't a question, but rather the story of an experience I had with a woman that I felt was a great way to bring home several key points for women who are interested in dating successfully.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS The first thing that struck me about Katherine (not her real name) was how attractive and self-possessed she was. I met her in an airport, where she was on her way to Dallas to buy a home. Having done my typical "ring scan", I asked her if her husband would be supportive of whatever she decided to buy. Her reply was "I'm not married - I'm not even dating anyone!"

I do try to keep my opinions to myself (unless asked), but this is one of those areas I would call a personal campaign, so I jumped right in and told her that her jewelry pegged her as a married woman. What she was wearing was a large band on her left ring finger and a very large, glittery ring with a huge gem on her right ring finger. This screamed: "I'm off the market".

I asked her if she wanted to be in a relationship, to which she answered "Well, yeah, but men just don't come near me!"

I got excited about the possibilities I could see for her.

MAKE IT EASY FOR THEM Katherine was eager for help. The first thing I did was to suggest she keep (both) her ring fingers free from any type of jewelry that says "taken". I then shared with her some things about men that are important to keep in mind as a single woman:

- . • First impressions happen in a split second, and men are EVERYWHERE;
- . • Men notice way more than you would believe;
- . • You have no idea how many men – decent, honest men – see the rings and keep on going, without ever skipping a beat;
- . • Don't think that if the ring is on the right hand, or it's a family heirloom from your "Granny", that a man will assume you're single;
- . • In some cultures, married women wear their rings on the right hand;

- Why reduce the odds of meeting a good man by ANY amount by appearing to be unavailable?
- We have to make it easy for a man to approach us, and appear to be a “safe bet” - remember how fragile their egos are.

Katherine promised to take off the rings as soon as she got home, and to leave them off until she was in a relationship. Who knows - the man she attracts may shower her with so much jewelry that she won't have any fingers left for her old stuff!

BE AWARE OF YOUR MESSAGE The point of my story is this: make sure that you aren't inadvertently telling men that you're not available. This brings me to the next part of the story about Katherine.

“NO, THANKS, I'VE GOT IT HANDLED” What I “read” about Katherine the instant I laid eyes on her was something I call the “No, thanks, I've got it handled” syndrome. She was clearly a woman who could, and did, do it all alone, and perfectly. In fact, I think that the last thing she would ever allow herself to do was to need someone. I asked her if she found it hard to receive from people, or to ask for help. She smiled and gave me a sassy “I sure do!” I know many women like Katherine, for whom the exterior shell (looking good, having everything handled, needing no help from anyone) covered a very tender and vulnerable woman.

I knew that this was hard for Katherine to talk about, but I felt that she needed a little help to make the adjustments that were necessary to be authentically happier, and attract good men. I asked her why she found it so hard to ask for help. She started off with a predictable “It's easier if I do it myself - no one else does as good a job, and I don't want to take the time to show someone how to do it the way I need it done”. As we continued to talk, we got to the next layer, and she said, “if I do everything myself and don't need anything from anyone, I won't be let down. If I take care of things, no one has a chance to disappoint me by not giving me what I've asked for.” Finally, we got to the truth behind these statements. Katherine said that she felt that if she were good enough, took care of enough things for enough people, and never asked for anything (i.e., was never a “problem”), she might eventually get the love she always wanted.

SO WHAT IS GOING ON?

REAL VS. DEFENDED It's a hard time in our evolution. Women seem to be rewarded in many arenas for exerting more of their “masculine” qualities. In climbing the corporate ladder, for instance, competition, logic, goal-orientation, and toughness seem to get the desired results. These qualities continue to get sharpened throughout the week, and they can be hard to shut off when it comes time for men and romance. Of course, this is exactly where more of the “feminine” qualities – such as being able to receive, being warm, empathic, caring, etc., - are going to be more effective at attracting a good man. I am NOT suggesting that you play a game here. The qualities that I have described are who you are, when you are not being ‘defended’ or guarded. This is your real and true nature as a woman, even though it can feel scarier for you to be that way. A great deal of self-trust is required in order for you to be ‘seen’ as the real you. You've

got to trust that you can handle it if you get hurt or disappointed. For some of you, the issue is trusting that you can handle it if you are successful at getting what you really want – but that’s another subject for future discussion.

THE COST, THE PAYOFF Men are wired to give to, and protect, women. Is a man’s first impression of you that you don’t need or want that from him? In my opinion, this was exactly what was keeping Katherine from attracting a man who would be a good fit for her. By the way, Katherine had no shortage of suitors who were eager to have her take care of them, which is the type of man you might attract when you project the “No, thanks, I’ve got it handled” message. She had actually dated several men who were not her equals in any way, and she had no desire or respect for them within a very short amount of time. What she did have, however, was control; she could determine how intimate, how trusting, how vulnerable, open, or available she would be...which was not much, if at all. Being “untouchable”, and not feeling “at risk” was her “payoff”, as we uncovered through our conversation.

LEARNING TO BE UNDEFENDED As I often say, relationship is our most powerful teacher. I encourage you to go for it, and take risks with being undefended – particularly in your dealings with men, although we could all benefit from being that way more often, in all areas of our lives. You may be asking: “How do I do that?” Good question!

- . • Start small – don’t expect to go from zero to 60
- . • Choose to experiment/practice with people with whom you feel safe
- . • Share the feelings, fears, desires or issues that you are dealing with
- . • Trust is a choice – just keep remembering that
- . • Admit that you have difficulty being vulnerable or trusting – that in itself allows you to be vulnerable and trusting!
- . • Spend time regularly connecting with your heart (use anything that inspires you)
- . • Read the vision you have for your relationship, at least three times per week
- . • If you don’t have your vision (either in writing or in collage/picture form), create it
- . • Nurture your feminine self – baths, massage, or whatever way works best for you

IN CONCLUSION I hope that Katherine’s story has given you some insight into what may be interfering with your connections with men. You may believe that you need to be “one of the boys” in your professional life – and I am not convinced that being that way is better – but in your romantic pursuits, it will not work. Period. A man is looking for a safe haven, a soft landing place, after doing battle all day long. He is not interested (not for long, anyway) in continuing that battle when relating to a woman he desires romantically. We all know women (or have been these women) who have created that dynamic with their men. Without exception, these women (will) lose. So...take the road less traveled...allow yourself to be your undefended, highest and best self. The risks exist, but the rewards are spectacular.

“Even though you may want to move forward in your life, you may have one foot on the brakes. In order to be free, we must learn how to let go. Release the hurt. Release the fear. Refuse to entertain your old pain. The energy it takes to hang onto the past is holding you back from a new life. What is it you would let go of today?” ~ Mary Manin Morrissey OF PEBBLES AND PATHS

Dear Karen,

How do you stay motivated and positive when you feel like you are applying all the learned techniques to meeting your mate but are still not having any luck? ~ Andrea

Dear Andrea,

To start, let me congratulate you for being on the dating path. Dating will call forth all of who you are as a woman. It will test you, and will teach you. By choosing to perceive dating in such a light, this time in your life will become one of the biggest gifts you will ever receive.

The dating process isn't just about the men you meet and date. Your experience with these men is a powerful vehicle, absolutely. But this process is about you - who you are, how much you are willing to trust yourself, and how deeply you are connected to what you want your life to be.

To select a lifetime partner who is truly a good match for you, you'd better know who you are. That makes sense, right? And, you'd better be willing and able to reveal that woman to the rest of the world so this man can see you and connect with you. I call that having the courage to be undefended.

It takes courage to be vulnerable, to be seen for all of who you really are and are not. It takes deep belief and trust in yourself to know that you'll handle whatever happens along the way to a great relationship. You may make an error in judgment and get hurt. Or, you may fall in love with someone who does not have the same feelings for you. You may find the relationship of your dreams and find that it scares you! Courage and trust will get you through.

You talk about applying all the "learned techniques." As I'm sure you are aware, there is no shortage of information about the things to "do" to get men. Many of those techniques can be useful because they give you the best chance to meet and spend time with men. But, if you are not guided by a vision about what you want your life to be about, and how you want your relationship to fit with that, you are more likely to get scared by little things, to have your sights set on very short-term results, to become discouraged, and to stray from your true desires.

Think of it in these terms: if you look down at your feet while you are walking, what do you see? Your shoes and the surrounding area. Your whole world becomes limited to the few square feet you see. It's hard to figure out where you're going, and setbacks and

delays seem huge. But, if you keep your destination in mind, you lift your head to look in front of you, and you see quite a bit more. You now have a dramatically broader perspective. A bump in the way becomes just a small pebble to overcome.

"A small trouble is like a pebble. Hold it too close to your eye and it fills the whole world and puts everything out of focus. Hold it at a proper distance and it can be examined and properly classified. Throw it at your feet and it can be seen in its true setting, just one more tiny bump on the pathway to life." - Celia Luce

The pebble parallels what happens in the dating process. If your view is too narrow, every little thing that happens takes on giant proportions. But by working from a larger vision, it's much easier to take setbacks and delays in stride and keep moving toward the relationship you seek.

Allow the dating process to take its own time. Along the way you will learn:

- . • to be effective with men;
- . • to communicate what you need and consider what they need;
- . • to take risks in trusting yourself as well as them, and
- . • to strengthen your belief that you deserve what you want, so you don't compromise yourself or settle.

These lessons are important in sustaining a successful relationship when it does come.

Another important benefit of dating: the world is in dire need of healing in the relationships between men and women. Consider that every man you encounter on your journey is someone who needs to receive the gift of you seeing the best in him. Imagine that every man you get to know will go on his way feeling better about himself and about women, and more hopeful about his future. It's a great opportunity to acknowledge that who you are makes a profound and needed difference in the world.

You also said that you weren't having any "luck." Frankly, I don't believe in luck. I believe that we are each always creating our lives. I think that whatever you put out in the universe comes back to you.

Finally, to keep your motivation high, get in touch with your vision and nurture it. Get out there and spend time with men and keep learning how wonderful they are. Believe me, it IS only a matter of time before you are in the relationship you desire.

SLOW DOWN, YOU MOVE TOO FAST

Dear Karen,

I will only date men that I feel a strong attraction to right away. My friends think I'm too picky, but I can't imagine myself spending time with someone if I don't feel chemistry. What do you think? ~ Judy

Dear Judy,

Boy, does this question bring me back to my own dating history! I completely understand where you're coming from, and I hope I can help you avoid some of the pain I've experienced in the name of chemistry.

REPEATING OLD PATTERNS

Before you panic and think I'm going to advise you to give up on chemistry, let me say that I do believe it's a very important aspect of a successful relationship. However, the chemistry that many women feel within those first few electric moments of meeting "that special guy" is usually rooted in what causes the eventual heartache that so many women experience time and time again. You can learn how to do this a little differently, and, in fact, if you really want to be successful, you need to. Remember this old adage: "If you keep doing what you've always done, you'll keep getting what you've always gotten!"

THAT INSTANT RECOGNITION

So you know that thing you typically respond to when you feel that "chemistry", initially? There is something you sense instantly, whether or not you are consciously aware of it. For me, it was a certain aloof and independent air about him (I eventually called those men the "James Dean" type). When I encountered a man like that (and I could spot him in a crowd in a matter of seconds), I would become powerfully drawn in and feel connected, as if I knew him already. And, in every single situation - without exception - it ended up being a man who was not able to give me what I wanted. The truth of the matter was, I DID know him, and that is my point. Some deep part of me knew what was not possible with this man: intimacy, connection, acceptance, commitment, comfort and happiness. In all my years (15 and counting) of working with women, I've seen this to be true for so many women.

WHO'S REALLY UNAVAILABLE HERE?

If you believe, as I do - without reservation - that "like attracts like," the important thing to look at here is the fact that (most likely) it is you who is not available for intimacy, connection, acceptance, etc. (as was certainly the case with me).

That may feel like the most ridiculous thing you've ever heard. How could that be possible?!?! After all, you try so hard...you feel things so deeply in your relationship(s)...you give so much to a man you care for. Surely it's not YOUR issue. You just seem to attract the wrong type of man, every time, you poor thing. I really do understand, and I believe you can break free of this pattern.

CHANGE YOUR "POINT OF ATTRACTION" Another way of looking at "like attracts like" is through another saying I like: "You will attract who you ARE, not what you want". So, if this is true, the way to move ahead to the relationship you really do want is to change the place where you are currently, (which is your point of attraction).

Here are the seven steps I recommend:

- 1) know your values, and live in a way that reflects them;
- 2) know what your vision is, for your life and for your relationship, and be that woman now;
- 3) know the qualities that are your absolute bottom-line requirements in a man;
- 4) “BE” those qualities yourself;
- 5) Live your life in a way that brings you joy and fulfillment NOW, rather than waiting for him to create that for you;
- 6) remind yourself at all times that you deserve the love and relationship you want;
- 7) when meeting/dating men, use all of the above as your screening tools (rather than that fiery initial attraction), and allow for the possibility of attraction to develop, rather than needing “chemistry” from the get-go. If, after a few dates, it isn’t developing, then you can move on.

IN CONCLUSION Chemistry is a very powerful and important element in a successful relationship. However, it’s critical to your success on the path to the relationship that will make you happy that you are able to differentiate between the type of chemistry that is rooted in the old patterns of relationship that cause eventual pain, and the type that leads to your romantic dreams coming true.

DISMANTLING THE LIE

Dear Karen,

I have a problem that has come up. Sometimes when I meet someone that is really fantastic, I get the old "he's way too good for me" feeling. I know that this is really bad and I try to tell myself it's silly. I'm afraid I'm projecting out what's going on inside. Do you have any suggestions about what I can do? ~ Anon.

Dear Anon,

I hope you know that what you’re describing is a common feeling for women; in fact, it hits men, too. Let’s work on getting you to a more powerful place, so you can be out there shining your brilliance, and attracting a great man to you.

THERE IS NO REALITY, ONLY PERCEPTION Remember that the message you’re hearing, although old and deeply ingrained (based on “I’m not good enough”), is simply a thought that has been repeated often and FEELS like the truth. It is NOT the truth, however, it is a LIE. The issue is that your subconscious mind cannot differentiate between what’s real and what is not. It’s going to believe as reality whatever it hears most frequently.

FEEDBACK FROM YOUR BODY Here’s the simple (yet hard to do) solution: inundate your mind with the message that you want to believe as the truth. Ironically, this IS the truth – that you are infinitely worthy of what you want, and that you’re good enough to

attract the right man for you. For the purposes of this exercise, it's best if you come up with your own language for this "mantra" or "declaration" – something that creates a deep feeling of "knowing" in you. The more of a response you feel in your body, the more impactful it's likely to be for you.

OLD HABITS DIE HARD If you decide to take this on - and I highly recommend that you do - just be ready for the old message to sound even louder and more "true". The old habitual belief, which is really your fear, does not want to let go. That part of you feels that you're in danger of annihilation if you allow yourself to risk believing that you deserve what you want.

To successfully change your beliefs you need the following:

- . • Commitment – this is what you have guiding you. It's what you draw on when you don't believe your new "mantra", and when the old message is taking hold strongly. You stand on the knowledge that your commitment to having the relationship you really want, particularly the one with yourself, is more important than anything else.
- . • Discipline – this is how you act on your commitment. You do the work, no matter how you feel – whether too tired, too scared, too bored, too distrustful of the outcome, or anything else that your fear will manufacture. Please expect that your fear will present many obstacles along this path.
- . • Compassion – this is what you draw on when you are feeling the old negative self-talk coming up again ("this is bad", "this is silly"), or when you see that you've reverted back to old fear-based behavior. By the way, I intentionally said "when", not "if", because it will be a part of your life for a long time. Whenever you step outside your comfort zone (and, by definition, feel fear), your first impulse will be the most practiced – that makes sense, doesn't it? So, instead of the critical attack on yourself, try saying something like: "I must be pretty nervous right now, and my old, fear-based beliefs are trying to take over. I'm safe to believe that I am worthy of having what I want, and I know I can handle whatever happens." Make sure that the soothing message you use is one that works the same way as the "mantra" we talked about earlier, meaning that it resonates in your body.

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE The other thing you mentioned in your question was that you were afraid you were projecting out what you were feeling inside. I'd like to tell you that that isn't true, but your suspicion is reality. We're always communicating our attitudes and beliefs, no matter what we're saying or doing. I have only one thing to say about men picking up on your feeling: **SO WHAT?** You're doing the best you can, and you're learning. Stay unattached to any outcome (I know this is way easier said than done), and enjoy being out there and flirting/mingling with men. Think of it as practice. See yourself as courageous enough to even **BE** out there, and look at the responses you're getting from men as important feedback about how your practice is going.

IN CONCLUSION If you work this program consistently enough, and stay on your path - no matter how you feel - you'll start to notice that you're feeling good about yourself more often than not. You'll become aware of a sense that you're worthy of what you

want. You'll start to see an upgrade in the men who are coming into your life. Ultimately, you will attract a great man with whom you can spend your life. In the meantime, enjoy the journey, and remember to HAVE FUN!
WHAT YOU GET IS WHAT YOU SEE(K)

Dear Karen,

How does a woman know she truly wants to be married and to be dating for the man of her dreams? I think I am, but then find myself in casual, fun relationships. I don't know if this is a sign that I am not ready for dating for the man of my dreams yet, or if I just keep falling into old patterns of behavior? ~ Jennifer

Dear Jennifer,

What a good question! And the fact that you're looking at whether or not it reflects a lack of readiness on your part tells me that you are doing good work about this – good for you!

READY, OR NOT Your question has two distinct parts to it, and I will address both. There are plenty of women who feel that they really want to be married. I think it's great to answer the question: "WHY do you want to be married?" Here are some of the answers/reasons I've heard (in no particular order):

- . • I don't want to have to work for the rest of my life
- . • I'm tired of living alone
- . • I hate to have to do all the chores by myself
- . • I want children very badly
- . • I want someone to care about where I am when I'm not home
- . • I want to be loved and cherished
- . • I want to share my life with someone special
- . • I want to grow old with a soul mate
- . • I want to know that I will be supported, no matter what
- . • I want to have what my parents have
- . • I have always known I wanted to be married – since I was a young girl
- . • It's the natural thing to do, when you're ready
- . • I want an intimate, committed relationship that lasts forever
- . • I believe in marriage

I don't know if you see yourself in any of those answers, but I will tell you one thing I believe wholeheartedly. If you don't marry because you want to GIVE all the love you have in your heart to give, you are going to be in trouble, at some point. It is the only way you can be sure of having the relationship you want. There's an old saying: "If you want to get love, give love". I'm not saying that all of those items on the list won't happen; I am saying that the only way you can truly be fulfilled in a relationship is through giving. Everything else lends itself to expectations, or score-keeping, or resentment, or withholding, or disappointment, or...you get the idea.

THE UNIVERSAL LAW OF ATTRACTION You may have noticed a theme running throughout my responses: namely, “like attracts like”. What this means in the dating world is that you will attract men who are where and who you are. If you buy the Law of Attraction. I believe this law completely.

You say you keep finding yourself in fun and casual relationships, and wonder what is going on with you. This could be either a reflection of where you really are, or it could be that you are still acting out habitual ways of relating/attracting that haven’t caught up to where you’ve evolved.

FEELINGS ARE POWERFUL GUIDES One way you might be able to access which one is at play, is to tune in to how you are feeling when you are engaged in these types of relationships. Do you feel fulfilled and happy? Do you like who you are, and do you feel good about how you are behaving? Or, do you feel hollow, with a nagging sense of doubt, and perhaps less confidence?

If you are experiencing any of the good feelings, you are probably attracting from a more true place, and it probably tells you that you are right where you should be. If you notice that your feelings tend to run toward the negative end of the scale, you are not being true to yourself. Your behavior is not in synch with your truth. It may be as simple as acting from old, habitual ways, or it could be something more.

HONORING YOUR TRUE SELF Not being true to yourself is a very painful way to live, and it cannot attract what you really, truly want. Because we are always attracting WHO we are, and if we’re not being fully guided by who we are, then we are attracting who we’re trying to be, or who we’re trying NOT to be...in either case, we are in trouble.

One important note here: if you are not okay with attracting who you are, then you are not ready to be in a committed relationship. Quite simply, if you do not embrace who you are, 1) you will not attract someone who will embrace you, and 2) you cannot fully embrace another. This type of relationship is doomed.

IN CONCLUSION It is critically important that you know and accept yourself before you try to find a relationship to commit to for life. Prior to that, your “point of attraction” is not real, or solid, and it will not create the foundation for a successful partnership. You may pull off attracting something that feels good for a while, but it is highly doubtful that it will last. Secondly, when you know that what you want to do is give love, rather than being motivated by wanting to receive love (or support, or a break from the grind, or relief from your life, or any of the short-term needs), you are in a much better place to create a relationship that is strong, steady, and likely to create a wonderful future for you both.

On the road to that future, stay connected to how you’re feeling, as it’s a good way to know whether or not you are being true to yourself. And don’t forget to enjoy the journey!

WORK IT GIRL!

Dear Karen,

Some of my friends think I come across as too “stiff” when I’m out, and think I should flirt more. The problem is that first of all, I’m bad at it, and second of all, I think it sends the wrong message. Do you have any suggestions about what I should do? ~ C.L.

Dear C.L.,

I love your question! I’ll tell you this right off the bat: I’m a HUGE fan of flirting (in fact, I’ve taught a seminar called “Fun with Flirting”). I’m looking forward to helping you with this issue, and sending you off to have some fun.

IF YOU BELIEVE IT, IT’S TRUE Let’s first address your concern that you’re sending out the wrong message when you flirt. I have two words for you: no way.

This problem is a simple matter of perception (yours), and it is probably why you think you’re so bad at flirting. All you need is a little attitude adjustment, because, no matter what you’re doing, your attitude/belief is what you are communicating. This can end up creating the very thing you fear, which is to be misunderstood, to project “wrong message”, and then have to fend off unwanted attention. Remember: you will manifest/produce/attract what you expect. It’s a self-fulfilling prophecy, basically.

AS NATURAL AS THE ELEMENTS To work on changing your perception, try to think of flirting this way: you are simply enjoying the fact that you’re a woman, and he’s a man. You’re appreciating that the two of you are from different planets (thanks, John Gray - author of “Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus” - for that frame of reference). You are acknowledging that men are not like you, and that you think that’s fun. It’s just a sweet way of offering a compliment to a man, really.

A fantastic benefit of flirting is that you get to practice feeling good about yourself (one of my favorite sayings: “fake it ‘til you make it!”). Have you ever seen a woman when she’s flirting up a storm? Doesn’t she seem to like, admire and respect herself? Do you see how feminine she feels, and acts, and how men notice her? Flirting is as natural as sunshine, or breathing, or the movement of the ocean. Have you ever watched a movie where you could see the dynamics of flirting at play, and it made you smile? (Think of Marilyn Monroe in “Some Like it Hot”). I’d love to see this be your attitude about being flirtatious: it is your natural expression of your feminine energy...a way to honor the essence of you as a woman.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TOOL If you want to end up in a wonderful, fulfilling relationship with a man who will make you happy, you have to know how to attract him. It just makes sense that you want to do that in an effective, efficient way.

When you are an effective flirt, you’ll be able to let an interesting man know that he’s safe to approach you. Remember this: no matter how hot, handsome, and great a catch you think a man is, he – like the majority of men in the world - deals with fear of

rejection as an ongoing issue. The better able you are to communicate that he won't be rejected, the more likely he is to approach you (if he's available, and attracted to you, that is).

If you can just think of flirting as a compliment, and a way to express the essence of your femininity, you can avoid taking it personally when a man doesn't respond favorably. You can flirt with no expectations, and just do it for the generosity/fun/adventure that it is.

FLIRTING 101 Here are some great flirting tips to try on, once you've adjusted your attitude towards this ancient art:

Phase I (this is to be used when you'd like a certain man to approach you):

- Eye contact – without coming across as a psycho/stalker, learn to maintain eye contact for long enough to communicate that, yes, it's him you see, not the guy next to him (remember their risk-aversion). If you can't do it in one shot, it's fine to look at him, look away, and then look back again.

- Smile – smiling is such an easy thing to do, and yet, when we're afraid, it's as if someone injected botox into our entire face and we become expressionless. Practice in front of your mirror, so you know when you're smiling in a warm, natural way (again, let's steer clear of psycho/stalker).

- Body language – keep your body open, receptive and inviting; if you tend to cross your arms in front of you, practice keeping your arms open; make sure you aren't keeping your back to him; keep yourself more open to his position in the room; play with your hair, earrings, necklace, etc., (only if it feels natural to do so).

Phase II (this is when you're talking with a man you like)

- Touch – because men are so physical/non-verbal in their communication, when you put your hand on them (arm, hand, leg – keep it appropriate and respectful), it is a very powerful way to connect, and shows your approval and interest.

- Listen – he's likely to notice a woman who is keenly paying attention to what he's saying (or asking him questions to draw out more of what he's talking about).

- Laugh/be responsive – men really need our approval, so the more you can favorably respond to what he's saying, the more he's going to appreciate you

Note: (don't fake this. If you really don't approve of him – you'll end up attracting a man you are going to reject, so please save him from that fate.)

Phase III (this is when you have nothing to lose – he hasn't really noticed your flirting, one of you is about to leave, and you want to have no regrets)

Your card – you should always be prepared with cards that have your name and number on them (cell phone, if you have one, so you feel more protected). When you know you wouldn't be putting a man on the spot (do this privately), walk over to him and give him

your card, saying something like “if you wanted to go for coffee some time, I’d really like that”. Smile warmly, and then walk away, so he doesn’t feel pressured to respond. This is one of those “last-ditch” things, and you must be okay with his never calling you. This would be just another way of offering a man a compliment, with no expectations (and if you could never see yourself doing this, don’t worry about it – lots of women wouldn’t, and it’s perfectly fine).

IN CONCLUSION One of the most natural things in the world for women to do is flirt. It’s in our genetic coding. Once you have the right perspective about it, and understand what fun you can have, how powerful and feminine you can feel, you can unleash this part of you. Most men will really appreciate the attention, and you can enjoy the results!
YOU CAN HANDLE IT

Dear Karen,

I know what I have to do and it’s so hard to change old habits – any hints on being successful? ~ Jane

Dear Jane,

I believe we all know what to do, deep in our hearts, even if we find ourselves not doing it at times. You are not alone. This is a great topic. Thanks for sending in the question!

IT’S TOO HARD The reason you have a hard time breaking old habits is because they’re **EASY!** They are your “comfort zone”, and to leave your zone means you have to face a hard thing: **FEAR.**

Some of you reading this may say “What do you mean, easy?!? What I’ve been doing has caused me great pain!” I maintain that, although you may feel discomfort as a result of your old habits, it’s nothing compared to the imagined pain you would experience as a result of taking the risks needed to do it differently. Think about it. Do any of these resonate for you?

- . • You feel the pain of being alone, but you are not willing to risk the pain of rejection;
- . • You feel the pain of being unsuccessful, but you are not willing to risk the pain of judgment;
- . • You feel the pain of having few/no friends, but you are not willing to risk the pain of abandonment.

What else belongs on this list, for you?

THE BIG, FAT LIE It is just not true that you are inherently destined to be rejected, judged or abandoned. That is a very old story you live from, and because it has been your “truth”, you have manifested situations that match your “reality”. That is the root of

your “old habits”, and it’s time to replace them with NEW habits.

This is not a guarantee that you won’t be rejected, judged or abandoned, by the way. One of the new “habits”, or ways of thinking, is to stay connected to the truth that you can handle whatever happens. And you can. To go after love, and to allow yourself to experience it, means you are going to open yourself up to all kinds of feelings and experiences: hurt, disappointment, rejection, etc. On the flip side there is joy, freedom, expansiveness, esteem for yourself and others, and many other wonderful states that you just cannot experience fully if you are keeping yourself from experiencing the depth of who you are. Your core is love, and that you can trust to guide you to, and attract, what you desire.

THE “DO-ING” PART You asked if I had any hints on changing old habits. Here is the list of what to DO, once you are grounded in love, rather than fear:

- . • Create some sort of mantra, or affirmation, or declaration, or whatever you want to call it, that reminds you that you are lovable and wonderful, just exactly as you are, and then say it to yourself, or read it, (or sing it!) as often as you can daily;
- . • Get yourself in supportive environments and relationships, so that your new habit can be nurtured and strengthened;
- . • Get out of situations (whatever they are) that fortify your old habits – you need to give yourself every advantage to establish your new habits, and it takes time;
- . • Make sure you have a strong vision for what it is that you want, as it will be the strongest incentive to keep going when you want to go back to your old ways;
- . • Celebrate, acknowledge and praise EVERY thing you do that is even remotely close to your desired new habits – remember...what you put your attention on will grow!
- . • Finally, have compassion and tenderness for yourself when you find you’ve slipped back into the old comfort zone. Believe me, it will try hard to lure you back, and it may win once in a while. That’s okay - just get back to your intentional habit(s) as soon as you can.

IN CONCLUSION Fear creates powerful illusions, and it will do whatever it must to “protect” us. Of course, most of the time it is “protecting” us from the very thing that our heart desires. We must learn to overcome those fear messages and “truths” by replacing them with even stronger truths. This takes discipline and commitment. There’s a reason for the saying: “old habits die hard”. Just remember that you are infinitely worth it, and keep moving forward. You will find that you have planted your new habits before you know it, and you will be reaping the rewards in no time.

THE ALLURE OF THE UNAVAILABLE MAN

Dear Karen,

I feel a pull toward a man who sends mixed signals, and this isn't the first time this has happened. With this man, the situation goes something like this: He goes from..."I can't wait to talk to you again and see you"...to not calling. When we do talk again, he again says something along the lines of "It's so amazing to talk to

you again, I'm crazy about you." I have friends who get into similar situations, and, Karen, I'm wondering if you can shed some light on what is going on with this kind of man, and more important, why is the pull so strong for so many of us?
~ Wendy

Dear Wendy,

Great question! There are lots of women who share your experience, or something close to it. As you will read, it is certainly part of my story, as well.

WE KNOW MORE THAN WE THINK WE DO It is my observation (and belief) that we know things about people the instant we lay eyes on them - things we don't really "see" in the beginning, only to feel confused, sad, or betrayed later on, when those qualities "emerge".

I see women as powerful, intuitive beings. Ironically, one way to observe this power is to watch how women keep attracting the same men (or as the saying goes: "same guy, different haircut"). It is NOT an accident, or a coincidence. It is your uncanny attraction system at work.

THE LAW OF ATTRACTION Simply put, the Law of Attraction states that "like attracts like". So, if you have been attracting the same type of man, the best thing to do is to ask yourself what you could learn about yourself. Remember that the truth shall set you free; it's going on, whether or not you want it to be true. You may as well receive the gift of the feedback you're getting about yourself, through seeing what kind of man you are attracting.

Of course, you probably also want to stop putting yourself in the situation of being with a man who is unavailable. Do whatever you must to stop spending time with/around him. It is hard to sail into your brilliant future, while tethered to the mooring.

LEARNING THE HARD WAY My profound learning about this came years ago, when I was married for the first time. As I was going from marriage counseling to divorce counseling, I was trying to figure out HIS issues, and how it was that HE was so unavailable that it made the marriage impossible. As I slowly unearthed the truth about my own lack of availability to intimacy, it became clear that I was destined to attract a man that matched where and who I was.

THE ROAD TO CONNECTION

I'm happy to report that it IS possible to change the pattern, so you can have an intimate, loving, committed relationship. Hey, if I could do it, anyone can!

The steps that will get you there:

- Acknowledge the truth about your own lack of availability – you cannot

get where you want to go if you are not clear about where you are to start with!

- . • Get into some type of supportive environment where you can take risks with being intimate and vulnerable...you may be “faking it ‘til you make it” at first, but you will get there.
- . • Have a clear vision about the kind of relationship you really want – it is a wonderful way to keep yourself on track, and move towards your dream.
- . • Be gentle with yourself through your growth process – it can be daunting to learn to consistently BE what you are seeking in a mate.
- . • Celebrate ALL your successes...big, small, and anything in between!

IN CONCLUSION You will attract who you are. Paying attention to the types of men you attract is a very powerful way to learn about yourself – and it requires honesty and strength to do so.

With the right support, and vision, you can get there. Just remember, if you have been that consistent in attracting the same type of man, imagine what is possible when you focus that power towards what you intentionally want!

IF YOU THINK IT, IT IS SO

Dear Karen,

I would take more risks and put myself in places where I would meet men, but I am heavier than I’ve ever been, and I just know men don’t find me attractive. What should I do? ~ Miriam

Dear Miriam,

Oh, my goodness, woman - the time you are wasting! Please stop keeping yourself hidden away until you reach some imagined “perfection” in the eyes of men. Although it’s true that there are plenty of men who are going to be drawn to physical attributes over what is underneath, those are not the men for you. But, he won’t be able to find you unless you’re out there, struttin’ your stuff!

CREATING A REALITY Now, let’s work on getting you to a place where you can feel free to “strut your stuff”. Your question reminded me immediately of one of my favorite quotes by Norman Vincent Peale: “We tend to get what we expect.” In fact, if you have ever spent any time with me, either through coaching or at one of the seminars I lead, you have heard me say something along the lines of “perception is a choice, and it creates reality.”

We humans are interesting, aren’t we? Even if it feels bad, once we decide something is true, we will go to great lengths to gather evidence in support of that “truth”. One of my own examples of this, and something I share often, is that for many years one of my “truths” was that men couldn’t be trusted. And, through those lenses, I always found my “evidence”. I was right 100% of the time, and it allowed me to stay, as I call it,

“defended”.

So, how are you gathering evidence? Are you paying way too much attention to those men who are not only physically fit themselves, but have a svelte model-type woman on their arm? Are you putting yourself at risk of rejection by going after men like that? Are you perhaps noticing all the fitness buffs, and the ads on TV and in magazines, as more “evidence” that you must stay indoors, in your potato sack, until you’re “one of them”? Well, if you are, knock it off! Start paying attention to the women who are more like you, particularly the ones who are having fun on DATES! Make it a discipline to listen for, and see, the evidence that women who couldn’t care less about fitting into a size 6 are having a ball! Trust me, they’re everywhere. They happen to be the women who accept themselves just as they are, and expect others to do the same. By the way, many of them may even be on some type of program to become more in line with their intended weight or fitness level, but they’re not holding that as a requirement for being loved and accepted, and it’s certainly not preventing them from having a good time - NOW. LIFE IS CREATED IN THE NOW You may be thinking that if you wait until you are the right weight, you’ll be able to manifest the life/relationship you want. The only problem with that plan is that we build our own future from the only thing we have, which is the present. Your life is being created from how you’re BE-ing in this very moment. You cannot create a future of love, joy and acceptance from a place of “I’m not good enough right now”. So, if you don’t feel that men will want you because of your weight, you are not only creating that reality right now, you’re also building your future from that “truth”.

5 STEPS TO SELF-LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE

1. 1. Create a mantra/affirmation that will affirm how perfect you are – right now. Some samples: “I love and accept myself unconditionally, right now”. “I am loved and accepted unconditionally”. “I am whole and complete, just as I am”. “I am worthy of love, exactly as I am”. Make sure that the one you use has deep resonance for you.
2. 2. When you catch yourself in a negative thought or comment about yourself, say “Cancel! Cancel!” immediately, and replace it with a positive comment or thought.
3. 3. Keep an ongoing inventory of what is marvelous, lovable and perfect about you. If you really want to get some extra “oomph!” from this exercise, ask your friends and family to contribute to your list!
4. 4. Make choices throughout your day that reflect the love and acceptance you have for yourself (you know what I mean, right? Fruit instead of ice cream; join your friends when invited, rather than hibernate; shower and wash your hair before you go out; Choose clothes that flatter and delight you and your body; take the extra time out for a pampering treatment: manicure, massage, etc.)
5. 5. Get whatever help you need to support the choices you make for yourself: friends, therapy, books, coaching, support groups, workshops, or anything else that you know is going to keep you on your chosen path.

IN CONCLUSION There are men out there who can see beyond a woman’s appearance, and they are seeking a deep connection with the right woman. Before you can find that

kind of man, you must be your own soul mate, and give yourself the love and acceptance you have been seeking from outside yourself. Once you feel about yourself the way you want a man to feel about you, you will attract him. I'll sign off with an old saying that I love: "Believe it, and you will see it."

ON BEING YOURSELF

Dear Karen,

How do I give myself permission to be all of me, in the moment, in relationships? I'm finding myself looking for that "guarantee" that I won't be judged before I allow myself to be fully myself. ~ Trish

Dear Trish,

Ah, the old "I-need-a-guarantee-before-I-take-a-risk" scenario. Don't worry - you're definitely not alone!

RISK OF REJECTION Do you know that it's well documented that one of the biggest fears ALL humans have, right up there with death and public speaking, is being rejected? Yup. Everyone you know, and more importantly, those you don't know (the ones whose rejection of you looms large in your imagination) feel the same way you do. It could give you great comfort to see it that way, and it could empower you to take risks. After all, if that interesting man at the book store or grocery store feels just like you do, what could be the harm in smiling at him? We all like to feel accepted, right?

THE ATTRACTION PRINCIPLE IN ACTION As we are learning here, "You will attract who you ARE, not who you want". What does this mean to you? Well, if you have a hard time giving yourself permission to be fully yourself, then who are you being? And if you are not sure who you are being, you will be equally unsure of whom you're attracting. I think this perspective is important to keep in the forefront, since the best relationship for you is one based on the whole of you connecting with the whole of the man you choose as your mate. It's the only way to trust that what you have together is real, pure, honest, and the right foundation for a lifetime together. Not to say you won't have your challenges. That is built into the relationship equation! You don't WANT to have a relationship with someone who doesn't accept who you are – do you? Instead of seeing it as "am I good enough for him/them?" try on: "is he/are they a good fit for ME?"

LOVE ALL PARTS OF YOU – SO HE CAN! Loving yourself, exactly as you are, is the key to allowing yourself to be fully YOU whenever, and wherever, you are. This includes the things about you that are challenging, annoying, or irritating – not just the things that you know are universally lovable.

The probable truth is that the man who is the best mate for you won't feel annoyed or irritated enough to pass up being with you, because he will recognize that you are the best woman for him. As a side note, the chances are pretty high that he possesses those same "challenging" traits (or something similar), and he feels okay with himself, regardless of

those “quirks”. You will probably gain even more self-acceptance as a result of his accepting nature. Note: beware of the man who has too much self-judgment (I say “too much”, because we ALL have it to some extent, at various points).

THE ROAD TO SELF-ACCEPTANCE Here are some techniques you can use to increase your self-acceptance:

- Just make the decision that you accept yourself unconditionally, no matter what – that declaration and intention alone can be incredibly powerful.
- Keep a journal of all the things you like/love/admire/respect/are proud of about yourself – add things to it every day.
- Practice empathy and compassion, rather than judgment, when one of your more challenging personality traits comes up – what fear (usually the cause) are you dealing with right now?
- If you want to do something (perhaps) challenging, but has a very powerful impact: every night, before going to bed, stand in front of the bathroom mirror and say to yourself at least 25 times – while looking deeply into your own eyes – “I love you very much”.
- Be loving and patient with yourself at all times.
- Ask your friends and family to tell you what they like/love/admire/respect about you – and make sure to add it to your journal!
- Create an affirmation or mantra to say to yourself all day long (whenever needed, but also when you feel good) that makes you feel good about yourself.

YOUR BIRTHRIGHT It is my firm belief that our birthright is to love and be loved, and to experience trust and acceptance. The tricky thing about being able to have an abundance of these qualities in our lives is that so few of us were raised in an environment where those qualities were shown consistently. Of course, this is because so few of our parents/primary caretakers had gotten what they needed, either; so we end up having to learn to give ourselves (and those we love) things we may not have learned to receive. All things can be learned, though, with a strong enough desire.

IN CONCLUSION The key to giving yourself permission to be yourself, no matter what, is to have a very clear vision, and a strong drive to have an authentic, fulfilling life that honors who YOU are. This is how we can pull free of old patterns that, although painful, are “comfortable” because we know them so well.

Remember, the only way you are going to end up with relationships (and particularly the one with your mate) that are right for you, is for you to be all of you – and I do mean ALL of you. Trust that who you are is a fabulous fit with those people with whom you want to spend time.

WE TEND TO GET WHAT WE EXPECT

Dear Karen,

After resisting online dating forever (I’ve always thought it was something all the

desperate people did), I finally decided to sign up on Match.com. I'm so discouraged! It seems the only guys that are contacting me, I wouldn't have anything to do with. Should I keep at it, or find some other way to meet men? ~ M.E.

Dear M.E.,

Congratulations on pushing through your resistance...bravo! It's not often an easy task to shift from such a strongly-held position. By the way, as all my single clients will tell you, I'm a huge fan of online dating. And you've joined the most popular site, hands-down (although there are many, many sites that are very good – for links to some of them, please visit the website: <http://www.heartmatter.net/single.htm>, and click on resources).

TIMES HAVE CHANGED However you came by your belief that online dating was for desperate people, the numbers show that it has become the way a huge number of people are choosing to meet desirable singles (five million or so members on Match.com alone!).

It makes sense, if you think about it. The bar scene is hit or miss, and not very successful as a “dating strategy”; the workplace is now a landmine of rules and policies (dating co-workers prohibited, sexual harassment liability, etc.), and the community/church/social circle that would normally allow people the opportunity to meet that special someone is missing in most lives these days. Online dating takes care of those challenges to meeting people.

WE FIND WHAT WE LOOK FOR Now, let's deal with one of the issues that I see in your way: your negative attitude. In your question, there were two things that really jumped out – your attitude about online dating, and your attitude about the men who were contacting you. That is your old, we'll call it “auto-pilot” position. If you believe, as I do, that your attitude is your “point of attraction”, then you are creating the very thing you fear. Through having a negative expectation you are seeing, and attracting, what you do not want. Let's talk about why you have that attitude, and how you can shift it so that your online efforts are more productive...and fun!

DECONSTRUCTING THE FORTRESS WALL I have found in my many years of coaching women that there is often an underlying issue of feeling unworthy - of that perfect job/business, that dream home, financial abundance, and/or that lifetime relationship with the right man. I don't know if that's what is going on for you, but if it is, please realize it ISN'T true! You are inherently worthy of anything you desire, just because you are you. Here are some things you can do to connect with that truth:

- . • List all the qualities about you that you like/love/admire
- . • List all the people in your life that you care about
- . • List all the things you have, or are able to do, that you appreciate

Don't you feel more deserving (and abundant)? I'll bet if you went online right now and

edited your profile (I'm guessing it would be helpful to review it/change it), you'd be contacted by men who were a better fit for you. Why? Because that energy of gratitude and abundance is completely irresistible! Before you start dealing with the men who want to contact you, however, we need to tweak the second attitude problem I detected in your question: your feelings about the men.

WE ALL WANT THE SAME THINGS I'm sure you've heard that dating is all about the numbers, and, to some extent, that is true. You will date many men, and all but one will not be the right fit for you. The more you know who you are, and are clear about the kind of man/relationship that is best for you, the more closely the men you're attracting will fit what you're looking for. That's simply the law of attraction at work. The men who are not quite a fit, though, deserve your best, in my opinion. They have reached out, and taken a risk with you. They're looking for some, or all, of what you want, too: love, companionship, acceptance, fun, commitment, family, security, adventure, etc. So, if you can reach for an attitude of kindness and compassion, even if they're not the right fit for you, you will be living from a more authentic part of yourself, which will feel good to you. And, as I often say to my clients, the world is in desperate need of the healing magic you can sprinkle as you travel this journey to the relationship you want.

The men you're attracting are also providing you with good information because: "you attract who you are, not what you want." Notice the types of men who are seeking you out, and see if there is any pattern you can detect. What feedback are you getting? If you have the courage to look at yourself, you will be able to learn much about what you're communicating. In my book, this is invaluable information, and a great way to make adjustments so you can be more authentically yourself, and therefore attract the right man/men to you. If the feedback you're getting is that you are not where you want to be, give yourself the gift of doing the work you need to do: therapy, coaching, seminars, books, or any other vehicle you feel would best serve you. Remember: this dating process is not about getting married, but about you becoming your highest and best self as a woman. It's the most important work you'll do, in my opinion.

IN CONCLUSION Dating is, or can be, so many different things: a fun adventure, a nerve-wracking experience, a contribution to healing the relationships between men and women, and a chance to do some profound personal development work. It's available to you, so go for it!

CREATING SPACE FOR THE RIGHT ONE

Dear Karen,

A guy I was dating for a few months moved away, and although we are officially "through", we are still staying in contact by email. I'm having such a hard time with this break-up, and I don't know what to do to move on. I want to be in a committed relationship! ~ Penny

Dear Penny,

I've been where you are, my dear, and it is painful! Read on, and hopefully you'll feel better, and more clear about what to do.

“NO VACANCY”

The first thing I want to talk about is what you're doing by staying connected to this man whom you're no longer dating. Imagine that your heart is like a room. Imagine the part of that room where your romantic relationship lives. Now imagine that your ex is still sitting in the easy chair, kicking back, and resting comfortably. Not only is he still taking up tender and precious space (which is emotionally costly to you, since he doesn't really want to live there), but there isn't a “vacancy” for the right man to fill. Men's egos are so sensitive that only a man that doesn't want you to be fully available will be attracted to you, either because he's not available, or doesn't feel deserving of your complete availability.

Remember: LIKE ATTRACTS LIKE. If you're not completely available, you cannot attract someone who is.

HOW DO YOU MOVE ON?

In order for you to move on, and be fully available to the right man, there are two important things you must do:

- 1) acknowledge and appreciate all the gifts, lessons and opportunities that this relationship gave you, and forgive anything you need to (whether about him, or about you), so that you can let it go with grace in your heart, and use it as a “springboard” into the right relationship;
- 2) be very clear about what you really want, and why, and have the courage to stay on the path to that relationship, no matter what.

You may need to do some work before both of these things are in place, and there are lots of ways you can get help on that path. It's critically important that you are complete with this relationship – physically, emotionally, and mentally. Next, it is absolutely essential that you are clear about what you want.

If you don't know where you're going, you will never get there. And if you stay tethered to your ex, you can't move forward.

IN CONCLUSION It takes courage to claim your heart's desire, and then manifest it.

Decide to have no regrets, Penny. Go for it. You deserve it!

SELF LOVE IS THE ANSWER

Dear Karen,

I have been seeing a guy I really, really like, and he's not calling me as much as I

want. How can I get him to show more interest in me? ~ Anonymous

Dear Anonymous,

What a great question! You have much company on the path you are traveling, my dear.

First of all, good for you that you have met someone you like. It's a great feeling, isn't it? The adrenaline that courses through your body, the way your heart beats to the point it feels like it's about to jump out of your chest, the way it's so hard to concentrate on mundane things like work, driving, eating. Hey, wait...are we talking about love, or are we talking about drugs? Just kidding. Well, actually, I'm not. And it's a great place to begin, as we explore this month's topic.

THE "FIX" It is really important to be able to separate the chemical reaction that is happening for you physiologically (and it's a scientifically-proven phenomenon that you do go through a chemical change when "in love"), from the important process you must undertake so that you know you've ended up with the right man for you. Otherwise, you'll end up being controlled by the need for another "fix" of your (love) drug, and go look for the next man that gives you that feeling, or you'll turn the relationship you have into something that continues to generate the intense chemical reaction (creating drama is one common method).

As I say to clients all the time, it is eventually very important to feel that you have chemistry with the man with whom you are in a long-term relationship. It will carry you both through the inevitable "learning opportunities" that you will experience in your life together.

What is NOT a good idea is to turn that initial feeling of chemistry into all the evidence you need that he is the right one for you. This is only one part of what may be going on behind the scenes for you, but it's worth mentioning.

There is one more aspect to your question that is, in my experience (both personally, and with the many women I have coached throughout the years), a likely situation: you are not feeling very certain of your worth/value/attractiveness as a woman, and you think you need his reassurance that you are lovable.

IF HE LOVES ME, THEN I AM LOVABLE I find that when women are externally-focused for validation of their worth, it is a clear indication that there is not much internal validation (basically, a good sense of self-esteem) going on. If this is the case, you must believe me when I tell you, that no man will ever be able to shower you with enough attention, the right way, in the right time, to make you feel that you deserve to be loved. Not a chance. You will not be able to see, or receive, more love than you already feel for yourself. For more about this, I recommend reading "A Woman's Self-Esteem", by Nathaniel Branden. You will get some great perspective, as well as some good tools to work with in improving your sense of self-worth.

BEING CLEAR ABOUT YOUR REQUIREMENTS AND YOUR VISION Once you have accurately assessed the first two areas we've talked about, the next areas to focus on are: 1) whether or not you know what qualities you require in a man, in a relationship, and in your life. 2) After determining these qualities, being able to determine whether or not a man possesses them.

If you are not clear about your requirements and vision, you are much more likely to be caught up in the addictive behavior that can arise when attraction and chemistry are running the show.

If you are clear, good for you. Now, the job is to stick to what you know to be true, regardless of how enticing the hunk is. I know...how cruel can life be? But seriously, you will be amazed at how intense the chemistry will be when you allow yourself to be with the right man for you – a man who fits all that you must have.

ACT AS IF... Now to the heart of the matter. My clients have all heard me say this (some have heard it too many times to count): "Act as if." What I mean is simply this: if you want to end up in a fulfilling, wonderful relationship with a man who loves you, you must hold yourself in high esteem, and you get there by acting as if it is true. No matter how you are feeling. How do you do this? Here's a list of suggestions:

- . • be clear about your requirements and vision, and have an action plan to stay on track
- . • have a great, nurturing support system in place (friends, groups, coaching)
- . • be guided by what is important to you, and live your life in a way that honors that (instead of waiting for a man, just start living your vision NOW)
- . • make plans with friends/family (or on your own) that keep you feeling vibrant and excited about you and your life
- . • take care of yourself – your body, heart, soul and environment – in a way that says "I love, honor and cherish myself"
- . • trust that if you "Be What You Seek" – meaning that you are being true to yourself and your vision - you will attract the right man for you

- . • let go of needing to control the "who/what/when/how"

IN CONCLUSION It can be very hard to be patient, as you hope for the right man to come into your life. It can be excruciating, however, if you don't really believe you deserve what you want. This can cause behavior (control, manipulation, sulking, taking things personally, judgment of yourself or a man, etc.) that will NOT get you what you are seeking (to be loved and cherished, to be able to trust unconditionally, to be intimate and vulnerable, etc.).

What you want to focus on is being clear about who you are, what you value, what you want in your life, and how you will feel most fulfilled. Then set out to create that life NOW. No waiting. The man who is right for you will find you. Have faith, and go live a great life starting right now. Not only will you be happier without having to rely on

anyone else, but happy women who like themselves are extremely attractive to men. You may have noticed that I did not answer your question about how you could get this man to pay more attention to you. I hope the answer has become clear to you.

YOUR JOB IS TO FEEL GOOD

Dear Karen,

I went out with a great guy recently – I was feeling pretty excited about our connection, and thought he was, too. Then it took him almost two weeks to call again. I feel like he probably ran out of other women to call, and I was his “last resort”. It makes me not want to call him back. Should I just move on, and forget about him? ~ Jill

Dear Jill,

Whoa, Nelly! Although I would normally focus on the reasons to call him back (my recommendation), I’m going to go down a different path. So...slow down, relax, and let’s look at all the possible assumptions you could make about why it took him two weeks to call you. I call this playing with perception, and it’s one of my very favorite techniques for managing the most important thing: the way we feel.

And Jill, once you’ve read this, I hope you will be in an open and receptive place – so you CAN call him back.

PERCEPTION IS REALITY Perception #1 You felt as though you were his date of “last resort”, and it made you mad. You could be right; the guy really may not be as interested as you thought, and it could be that he went out with you because he ran out of other women to call.

Note: In my experience and observation of men, this is not very likely. If he wasn’t interested, he probably wouldn’t risk your negative reaction by calling you when it had already been a while. He’d probably call someone who was more apt to be happy to hear from him, and wouldn’t give him any (potential) attitude. Although men don’t seem to have the same concept of time as women do, there is a point where most of them know it’s been “a while”, and feel the weight of it. But, for the purposes of this exercise, let’s just say you could be right.

Perception #2 Following that thought, another possible scenario is that he’s one of these men who has little to no awareness of linear time. Like most men, he is single-focused, and takes on one thing at a time, so he could get immersed in something to the absolute exclusion of everything else. He emerges weeks later, only to notice that his pants don’t fit the same way (he either ate too much or not enough during his “marathon project”). He finally looks around his house/office/cave and sees that things are growing on his clothes/dishes/furniture. He looks at the calendar and is in total shock. But he’s finished with his project, and he’s PROUD! He’s got enough brain cells left to remember that he had this fabulous date with you, and he’d like to call and invite you to a celebratory

dinner/drink. And so he does.

Perception #3

He had a great – and I mean really great – date with this fabulous woman, YOU. It's been a very, very long time since he's experienced these feelings. In fact, the last time he felt this way, he fell madly in love with the woman and she broke his heart. So, because men can be chickens when it comes to matters of the heart, he takes the path well-traveled, and denies himself what could be the real love of his life, in order to avoid what might be another painful experience.

Perception #4

He had a great time, and was feeling very positive about the connection between you. He would have called you the very next day, but he didn't want to seem too "pushy". In fact, because he wants to come across as self-sufficient and not needy, he decides to call you in two or three more days. Then, things at work get totally nuts and by the time he stops to take a breath, it's been almost two weeks since your date! Yikes! He picks up the receiver to dial your number, and the voices in his head started talking to him: "What if she's really busy right now?" "What if she's not available any more?" "What if that stupid thing you said right after coffee turned her off?" "What if she's been feeling really relieved you haven't called her again?" "What if she's really pissed off that it's been two weeks, and she gives you the cold shoulder?" - Before you know it, he puts the phone back down, and decides to write the whole thing off.

Perception #5

He had a great time on the date, but when he later replayed the evening, he thought he had detected the slightest hint of a possible attitude from you. It felt very familiar; very much like his ex-wife/girlfriend. He decided not to risk getting involved with another woman who would control/nag/shame/criticize/withhold from/hurt him.

Perception #6

You actually were in a fearful and defended place during the date, and you did, in fact, show him the parts of you that could control/nag/shame/criticize/withhold from/hurt him.

Note: If that's in any way true, by the way, please don't worry about it. Definitely try to figure out what it may have been, and learn from it so you can plan to do it differently on your next date. Know that you were doing the best you could in the moment. Chalk it up, and move on to the next date. And there will be a next, and a next, and a next...because there are men everywhere.

Perception #7

He was pretending to have a great time, but internally counting the seconds until he could run away, screaming into the night, fleeing the worst date of his life.

(By the way, I hope you're really getting the point here, because these are all completely feasible explanations for why he didn't call you right after your fabulous date. In fact, did I miss any? Can you think of any other "stories" that are feasible?)

FEELING GOOD As you can see, if you really try, you can come up with several possible stories to explain a situation. Now, as you review the options listed above - or the one(s) you added - which one(s) make you feel better? Which one(s) make you feel worse? I'm guessing that as happens with so many women, you feel the negative stories are truer, even though they make you feel so bad. If you really think about it, it's all pretty subjective, and is only becoming "true" as you put your attention on it. It's a "movie" coming from your "projector".

Your job is to tell yourself the best possible "story", so that you feel as good as possible. If you can do that, the great benefit is that you have better interactions with men (or anyone, for that matter) because you feel more confident, secure, happy and courageous. From that place, you can welcome a call from men with whom you enjoyed spending time, even if it's been a few weeks since you went out. Or you can decide that you don't want to go out with him again, but it won't be due to your low self-esteem taking it all personally and creating a defensive reaction to his call.

IN CONCLUSION Be careful to monitor how you're feeling about yourself and, if you find yourself dipping into negative perceptions – of either yourself or someone with whom you're relating– play with the "movie" you're projecting and see if there is another possible script.

I often quote the poet/writer, Anais Niin, because she makes the point so beautifully: "We see things not as they are, but as we are".

THE FLEEING FELLA

Dear Karen,

Why do men get close, and then pull away? ~ Nancy

Dear Nancy,

The million-dollar question! Every woman who has dated actively in her life has dealt with this situation. Frankly, it's one of the biggest reasons that I perpetually advise women to date more than one man until they are SURE that the man they choose is ready, willing and able to be in the relationship they want.

SO WHAT IS GOING ON?

Several things could be going on with a man who's pulling away:

1) He's just not ready. You may have been communicating effectively that you are playing for keeps, which has him exit stage left because he simply is not. If this is the case, be grateful that you have not spent more time in this relationship, because it would not go where you want it to go anyway.

2) He is scared about how good it is, or might be, with you. He is taking time to regroup. One of men's primary fears (it's been said that it's a fear worse than death) is the loss of freedom. He is evaluating whether or not what he will gain with you is worth the inevitable loss of sexual freedom, his ability to hang out with the guys, etc. He may also be thinking ahead to the stresses of buying a ring, marriage, a house, college tuitions, etc. When this happens, your best bet is to stay busy, date other men, and live a life that you love and that fills you up. If you are still available and interested when he returns, don't "punish" him. Be happy to hear from him, and pick up where you left off.

3) You are experiencing "man time." This phenomenon occurs whenever a man gets involved in a project that consumes his attention. (Please note: This is anything at all, whether work related, sports related, hobby related...get the idea?) He loses track of time.

When he finally realizes the length of time that has passed since he last saw you or spoke to you, he's too embarrassed to call you. If you suspect this is the case, it's okay to drop him a short email, or leave him a brief voicemail. (Do not call him when you might get him live, since that may make him feel put on the spot.) Let him know you had a great time the last time you saw him, and that you hope he's doing well, or something that feels natural to you and that conveys that you are not angry with him.

4) You have stopped being the fun, accepting, happy woman he met and have become controlling, possessive, jealous, insecure, needy or just plain old not fun any more. If you suspect this is the case, go to whatever source works best for you to get what you need - PRONTO - and get back to a place of balance and self-worth. Whether or not he comes back, you are going to be in a great place to meet the next man, and you will have learned a valuable lesson about what NOT to do next time.

5) He may just have gotten that you are not the one for him (or he's not the one for you). You may feel disappointed about that, but, if that is the case, he has done you a tremendous service, because the relationship would have ended sooner or later. It's better for your heart when the inevitable end is not dragged out. If you suspect this is the case, count your blessings, take a little time to regroup, and get back out there!

WHAT NOW? Tune in to your gut or intuition, whichever you call it. I suspect that you know what is going on. If you are dealing with a man who needs some space and time to find his way back to you, you must give it to him or risk having him leave for good. Give both of you the gift of having him come back powerfully, under his own steam, to claim

you. Trust me, you will have many opportunities during your relationship to remember that with joy.

If, on the other hand, you have a man on your hands who is not going to give you what you need, the best thing you can do for yourself (and him) is to let him go. One of the most common situations I hear about from my coaching clients is the length of time spent in dead-end relationships, often at the expense of the best years for bearing children. Don't let that happen to you.

Of course, if you are the reason he's taking a leave of absence, get whatever help you need, from wherever will be most effective, to get yourself reeled back in. It's okay to be scared and insecure - we all get that way - but make sure you aren't letting yourself act out from that place.

LEARN THE LESSONS One more point: You might be asking yourself how to do exactly the perfect thing to ensure that he comes back. Do your best, and then let it go. Men are everywhere. As long as you are doing your best, your strongest plan is to keep learning what is available to learn. If you pushed too hard for a commitment, and he bolted, then don't do that next time. If you held on too long for a man who was not headed where you wanted to go, let go sooner next time. If you let your insecurities drive him away, figure out how to be more confident in yourself next time. Because, there will be a next time.

The Involved/Married Section

TRUSTING MEN

Why It's So Hard - an Eight-Point Plan to Trust

Dear Karen,

How do I know (really) if and when I can trust this guy? ~ Virgine

Dear Virgine,

When a woman talks with me about trust issues with her man, or men in general, the conversation we have typically turns to one about the level of trust she has in herself. I'm a big believer in the old adage: You cannot give that which you do not have.

Interestingly enough, we tend to view others from the same angle with which we view ourselves, namely, from the perspective of thinking that trust is conditional, and based on the results produced. For instance, often we may be willing to only trust ourselves or others if the desired outcome is guaranteed. But, conditional trust isn't really trust. It's a limited, carefully negotiated and tenuous arrangement, mostly dependent on a certain end product.

When it comes to successful relationships with men, believe me, it is critical that we be able to give our trust to them. This includes giving them the benefit of the doubt and

assuming the best, especially when things don't turn out the way we'd hoped. Men need our trust, and that generosity of spirit from us.

When you choose to trust (and it IS a choice), you are basically agreeing with the definition of trust as it appears in the dictionary: "Firm reliance on the integrity, ability, or character of a person or thing". Note that the definition doesn't include anything about being perfect, infallible, never making an error in judgment, never having a bad or scared day, or never making a mistake. (Keep in mind, this advice pertains to men who are basically trustworthy. I am not referring to addicts, cheats and the like.)

In relationships with men where trust is either conditional or non-existent, I think an interesting phenomenon comes into play. For many women, the closer they get to what they are really looking for in a relationship, the more something else happens: They get scared!

As women who have worked with me hear quite a bit, fear (False Evidence Appearing Real) can bring about any number of responses, most of them unproductive. For instance, many really terrific women, when faced with the relationship of their dreams, may be so frightened that they try to flee. They look for reasons to create distance from their man, perhaps by picking fights or zeroing in on evidence that "proves" that the man is not trustworthy, thereby "saving" themselves from the scary step of trusting. The good news: By recognizing when fear-based actions are taking control, women gain the power to stop acting on their fears and open up the opportunity to build trust in themselves, their man and their relationship.

Final note: If you can learn to trust yourself and your man, you will be giving both of you an amazing gift; one that will enhance the quality of your love, and your life, in a way that will amaze you.

Eight-point plan for achieving trust and success in a relationship with a man:

1. 1. Trust yourself.
2. 2. Decide you are worthy of what you want.
3. 3. Have a relationship vision solidly in place, and allow it to guide you.
4. 4. Know what you require in a man.
5. 5. Have good support in place so that when (notice I said "when", and not "if") you get scared, you can keep yourself in the relationship.
6. 6. Acknowledge how challenging it can be to trust at times, accept your slips and his, and love yourself and him anyway.
7. 7. Recognize and replace fear-based behaviors with trust-based ones.
8. 8. Have fun, for goodness sake!

SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO

Dear Karen,

When a man shows you time and time again from his actions that he loves you but

still says he isn't ready to commit to living with you or marrying you, how long should you wait for him to commit? ~ Anonymous

Dear Anon,

Well, this question should have quite a few women taking notice! Right off the bat let me say this: there is no set amount of time you "should" wait. The timeframe is completely personal. However, here are the criteria that I recommend women follow in order to find the answer that is right for them.

RELATIONSHIP AS TEACHER I believe that each relationship we attract - yes, attract - brings us two gifts: the person who can be a perfect teacher for us and what we need to learn, and the most profound vehicle for learning what is next for us. If you adopt this perspective, one of the questions you might ask yourself is: "What lessons can this man and this relationship teach me at this time?"

If you are on a path to becoming your highest and best self as a woman, which is what I believe we are all doing (consciously or not), then exploring how a current relationship is serving you on your journey could be extremely helpful. For example, if one of the issues that gets in the way of you being your best is asking for, or even being aware of, what you need, then maybe the relationship can teach you to be clear about what you need and how to ask for it.

One caution: Be careful that you don't end a relationship because you want or need a man to provide something you really should be getting elsewhere (remembering that you cannot get all your needs met by one person).

Really looking at a relationship's potential for moving into commitment might reveal that a man is up for the job at hand, or, it might show that he is not capable or willing to be committed. There are lots of things you can look at in his life, outside of your relationship, to determine if he's commitment material. You may also discover that the man you didn't think was "ready" actually might be but has had the feeling that YOU weren't really interested in moving in that direction. In any case, if you have stretched yourself and risked going for what you want and need, you will learn a lot about yourself - and your actions will make you stronger and bring you closer to your best self.

WHEN DO I GRADUATE? If you know that a man is never going to be the one you want and need, then, truly, any amount of time you spend together will be counter-productive. Let me explain: If you know he's not "the one," then your heart will be closed off in some way. You won't be able to accept and love him unconditionally. What part of you do you think is getting stronger in this situation? Right! The part that doesn't know how to be successful at creating and sustaining a fulfilling and committed relationship! Don't do that to yourself!

If you stay, you must know you can love and accept a man unconditionally while you are with him. This is what allows you to open yourself fully and to trust, to be intimate and

vulnerable. This is the only way you will see where a relationship can ultimately go.

You have to decide how much time you're willing to invest in the relationship. Is the clock ticking loudly? Are you already feeling as if you're at the end of your rope? Did you promise yourself you'd be at a certain point by a certain date? You get the idea. Anyway, set a date, keep it to yourself, and then forget it. That way, you're focusing on being in the relationship, not out of it.

WE ATTRACT WHO WE ARE The other issue I want to cover is the principle of "like attracts like." With that in mind, you may want to ask yourself if YOU are ready to be in a committed relationship. If the man you attracted is truly not available, ask yourself if you are. This is a huge area to explore, and it is critical to get to the truth. If you think it's all about him, and you move on to another relationship, you might find yourself in the exact same scenario, but with a new man.

LIKE ATTRACTS LIKE: AM I READY? The most important element in being "ready" is knowing, accepting and loving yourself exactly as you are. This does not mean that you are attached defiantly to aspects of yourself that don't work; it means you accept who you are, and, from that place, choose to work on whatever really doesn't support the life you want to live. How you view yourself changes what types of men you attract.

MOVING ON If you have undertaken all this work, know that a resistance to commitment is really his issue (not yours), and know that you must end the relationship, do it sooner, rather than later. Remember, you are doing more harm than good when you stay too long. Please do not play games or issue ultimatums. Focus on the time limit you set for the relationship early on, evaluate the relationship potential, and, if you know he is just not capable of commitment, tell him that you are moving on. How you do this is entirely up to you; I always advocate for making a positive difference in the "war between the sexes." If at all possible, please "sprinkle healing magic" on a man with whom you've been in relationship, no matter how long you've known him.

10 TIPS

1. Each timeframe is personal, so set one that works for you.
2. Consider your own ability to commit, and recognize when your own issues are limiting the potential for commitment.
3. Know, love and accept yourself exactly as you are.
4. Be sure your expectations of a man are fair and realistic, taking into account who he is, as well as the differences between how men and women relate.
5. Determine if you have more to learn from a man and a relationship.
6. Value what you are learning.
7. Know if he is who you want and need
8. Decide whether or not you are truly able to love and accept him unconditionally.
9. If you leave a relationship, "sprinkle healing magic" on the way out.
10. Trust you will end up with the man meant for you.

IN CONCLUSION All men and relationships are "teachers" and they appear when we are most ready for them. Our mission as women is to learn the lessons that allow us to blossom into our very best selves - the women we are deep in our hearts. Along the way, you will find the man with whom you are meant to be. Trust that.
THE BALANCE IN YOUR LOVE ACCOUNT

Dear Karen,

I really need help! I am married, and am finding myself wondering if I've ended up with the right partner for life. I feel scared. What should I do? ~ C.W.

Dear C.W.,

I appreciate your vulnerability in asking this question. I know there are many women out there who will get much from our discussion about this sensitive topic.

ROSE-COLORED GLASSES I am going to assume that in the beginning of your relationship, and as you went through the sometimes giddy, sometimes terrifying journey to your wedding day, you were in love with your husband, and you had no doubts he was the right man for you.

In this stage, you are both perfect; those annoying little things that try to get in the way of your perfect vision, as seen through your rose-colored glasses, get swept under the carpet quickly and easily – for a while.

THE LOVE ACCOUNT During this magical time, both of you are busy making deposits in the love account, and it just couldn't be any better. You can't do enough for each other, and you feel as if you float through your day, periodically getting grounded long enough to think of yet another sweet gesture that says "I'm crazy about you!" This account is very important, as it sustains both of you throughout the relationship. That is, as long as there is a positive balance.

OVERDRAWN The stage so many couples fall into, and don't seem to get out of on their own, is when the account has been tapped into more than it's been replenished. The love account becomes overdrawn. This process is usually started by one partner, with the other one following suit fairly quickly. What was once a never-ending quest to find new ways to be generous with love, affection, time, sex, etc., turns into an elaborate judging and scorekeeping system. For every "I give one", there's an "I better get two", just to get back to a place where things are "even-Steven". The problem is that every "give" is done from that place of keeping a tally, so it doesn't ever feel right – to either one of you.

OTHER THINGS THAT DEplete THE LOVE ACCOUNT There are lots of things that potentially interfere with our loving feelings for our mates:

- . • Money struggles
- . • Health issues

- . • One of you being out of work
- . • Unresolved conflicts that build quite a head of resentment
- . • Someone suffering from low self-esteem (due to an aging/over-underweight/poor body-image, or making a mistake, or being passed up for a promotion, etc.)
- . • Comparing to what others have, and having your mate “come up short”
- . • Feeling tired after a long day at work, whether in an office or at home with kids
- . • Family or friends being critical of your mate
- . • Dealing with difficulties in child-rearing (and many stages are difficult!)
- . • (Add yours here)

GO BACK TO WHAT WORKED My advice to you, C.W., is to start making consistent deposits in the love account, no matter how you feel. Just like you used to do.

Here’s an interesting phenomenon: When you are focused on what you’re not getting, or, on how hard your life together feels, you will tend to get more of the same. Conversely, if you focus on what you like or love about your life, or about him, and how lucky you feel, you will attract more of that. Mind where your attention is going, for that is what you are growing.

You really CAN change how you feel about being married to your husband. It is not even that complicated – although it will probably feel hard at first, depending on how deeply entrenched you are in the habit of making withdrawals from your love account. For instance, can you recall the special things you used to do that were your own “language of love” with, and/or for, your husband? For instance, did you:

- . • Send him cards and/or emails with sweet words?
- . • Cook him his favorite food?
- . • Look at him adoringly?
- . • Snuggle when you were on the couch?
- . • Let him overhear you bragging about him?
- . • Dress in a way that said you wanted to please him?
- . • Tell him how much you loved him?
- . • Love having sex with him, and let him know that you did?
- . • Share your hopes, dreams, fears...and trust his love?
- . • Appreciate any little thing he did for you?

All you have to do is start/keep doing those things, and make sure you’re making more of those deposits than withdrawals, (i.e. fault-finding) in the love account. Then, enjoy watching the balance grow, and revel in all the dividends your abundant love account will pay! I’ll bet you can fall in love all over again, or feel more deeply in love with him, and in a pretty short amount of time, too.

The other thing to do is to make sure you have a relationship vision that is absolutely vibrant for you, and a true expression of what is in your heart to create with your

husband, family and community. Then, follow that “map” as if your life depended on it. In a way, the best part of your life does depend on it.

HANDLING THE HEADACHES I am not, contrary to the way I may sound, a complete Pollyanna (although I do, happily, lean that way quite a bit!). I know that issues arise in every marriage. Hey, none of us married perfect men (And, need I say it? None of our husbands married perfect women!).

So, how do you navigate the troubled waters that periodically disturb the flow? I’d recommend that you go back to the basics. What do (did) you love about him? Why did you marry him? What did you promise to him on the day that you exchanged your vows? Once you have remembered that, and remember to trust that he wants you to be happy, ask him for what you need. If he feels your love and respect, he is WAY more likely to listen to you, and to try to give you what you need. Don’t wait to start this program. Depending on how long it’s been since the love account has been replenished, it may be a while before he responds favorably. Keep trusting that you married the right man for you, and focus on believing that he truly wants to make you happy. Just fatten up the account up first, and then see what happens.

IN CONCLUSION One of the things I find myself saying to clients time and time again is actually a phrase I came across in a book several years ago: “Perception is a choice”. Not only is it a choice, but it will create reality. So, if the man you married was close to perfect when you were first together (mostly your perception), realize that you have the power to recreate that. Believe me, you will be the biggest beneficiary of that perception.

Make regular deposits in the love account – for your sake as well as his. As the old saying goes, “If you really want something, give it.”

LET GO TO GET WHAT YOU WANT

Dear Karen,

My husband says he wants to be the provider – and up until now, it’s been me. How do I navigate this tricky road? ~ Linda

Dear Linda,

First of all, let me congratulate you. If your husband is telling you he wants to take over the financial reins, you have been doing something that has contributed to his inspiration to take this on. Now comes the tricky part: letting go of the reins!

“Of COURSE I want to let go of the reins!” you may claim. After all, isn’t this just what you have been hoping and wishing for?

CONTROL IS COSTLY

It has been my experience, over many years of coaching, that many women often have a strong, and often unconscious, desire to have control over their men. This drive to be in charge can manifest in many aspects of a life together: finances, children, sex, the home, the in-laws, planning the future, etc. I've found that the (unconscious) underlying motive is usually to avoid intimacy, even though women want it. Intimacy and vulnerability are often sacrificed as a result of control, anger, and/or manipulation.

WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO DO THAT?

Good question! Let's look at what it would take for you to "let go of the reins":

- . • Trust him to do what he says he is going to do;
- . • Trust that you can handle whatever happens;
- . • Surrender to not knowing;
- . • Let him be in charge;
- . • Find other outlets for your need to be in charge;
- . • Be patient.

Notice that these traits and behaviors are probably how you'd describe yourself, if you were being your highest and best self. It's NOT how you're likely to be if you are afraid. For many women, the need to control indicates an absence of trust. So, control is a fear-based behavior, and you don't want to have fear running your marriage. Or your life, for that matter. Remember what the acronym F.E.A.R. stands for: False Evidence Appearing Real. Or, when you're really in trouble, it stands for Forget Everything And Run!

CHANGE – OUR FAVORITE THING What you and your husband are undertaking is a big change for both of you. You may find that your husband falters at first, as he gets his "sea legs". In order for your man to be/feel successful with this new role he will have to sense that you are holding steady to your belief in him. You can be the wind under his wings, so to speak.

It may be a bit rocky at first. A radical change like this can stir up many things. Make sure you've got places to go to for the support you will need, so you don't end up sharing any panic, fear, or doubt with him. He should think that you are solid as a rock about your faith in him. Having said that, if he's never come close to making enough money to be the provider, it may take time for him to ramp up. Be patient, and manage your expectations so that they don't get out of control. Then again, with his new-found determination, and your strong belief in him, anything is possible. Just remember to notice every little thing he does that is even remotely moving in the right direction, and praise the hell out of him for it. And if/when he stumbles along the way, don't be the one to point it out to him. He is likely to be WELL aware of it, and he will be extra grateful for your unwavering faith in him at those moments.

GET SOLID ADVICE One other thing I would advise, so that your husband can keep his enthusiasm for this undertaking and stay on a steady course, is to get expert advice. You may want to talk with a Certified Financial Planner, or with your CPA, or with someone else you both trust that is really good with money. Your man might want to do this meeting without you. If so, don't take it personally.

IN CONCLUSION It is critical that you consistently hold your trust and belief in your husband through this process. If your support is all over the map, he will be, too. He needs to see that you know he can do it. And remember to have the support that you need for yourself in place, so you don't share any panic with your man. Take any negative stuff to the appropriate places, so that your needs are taken care of. This journey will undoubtedly test you both. If you are committed to passing the tests, you will emerge much stronger -both individually, and as a couple. Good luck to you and your husband, Linda!

AFFAIR-PROOF YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Dear Karen,

My husband has been getting friendly with a single woman – she's one of his customers – and recently went out to lunch with her. He swears nothing is going on between them, but I don't believe him. I feel like I can't trust him. How do I get him to stop spending time with her? ~ J.T.

Dear J.T.,

I understand your concern, and I appreciate the trust that it took to share this with not only me, but with all of my readers.

I'm going to make a few assumptions, in my answer to your question: you love each other; you're both committed to the marriage; you are willing to examine your part in this, and to take care of his needs.

THE SLIPPERY SLOPE I'd bet that when you and your guy were first married, you spent lots of time thinking of ways to make him happy. I'd also bet that you were quite free with expressions of admiration, appreciation, respect, love, acceptance and trust. These are like air for a man; without these things, it's hard for him to survive. Whether or not we understand this (or would guess the validity of this, given how they sometimes behave), men feel a huge amount of responsibility – for everything – and it is tough for them to keep going, day in and day out. Respect and admiration from the woman they love is the fuel they desperately need to continue to get out there and “slay dragons”.

Being our best comes so easily to us in the beginning of the relationship, when we feel energized by how perfect things feel when we're with him. Then, as must happen, the reality of life settles in. The things you didn't/wouldn't let yourself see about him (that made him less than perfect) start to become more apparent. For many women, the shift from “My life is perfect now, because I've been rescued by Prince Charming!” to

“Hey, what happened to my fairy tale life?!?” is a painful, and confusing, time. This is a very natural process, but it still catches most by surprise. The common “cure” (as evidenced by the – still – 50% divorce rate!) is to leave and go find the REAL Prince Charming (you won’t be deceived next time!). Trust me, your husband is still the exact same man/prince. You’ve simply misplaced your rose-colored glasses.

Why am I going on about this, you may be asking, since your question was about HIM spending time with another woman? Because I’m willing to bet that, once your glasses got lost, you stopped doing all those things that were so natural for you in the beginning. I’m also going to bet that what’s going on with him is that he’s just seeking that “fuel” he needs to keep going. This woman (and we’ll assume he’s telling you the truth about their friendship/relationship) is probably providing him with the admiration, respect and attention that he used to get from you.

GETTING OUT OF THE DANGER ZONE The thing that is very important for you to understand is this: although the time he’s spending with her may be innocent enough at this point, this type of thing can (not WILL, but CAN) evolve into bigger trouble for your relationship. He may find himself turning to her more and more for what he needs.

So, what do you do now? Here’s what I’d suggest:

- . • Make sure your ego (a.k.a. your low self-esteem) is not running the show (if you find yourself saying/thinking “why should I have to be the one to do this?”, or “this just isn’t FAIR!”, or “he shouldn’t be doing this anyway!”, your ego has control of you);
- . • Write down everything you like/love/respect/appreciate/admire about your man, and read it often (for more impact, show it to him);
- . • Write down a list of all the things you used to do (or still do) that communicate to your man that you respect, appreciate, admire, love, trust and/or accept him, and start/keep doing them – if this feels hard to do, pick the easier ones first, but make sure you keep at it until it’s easier and easier, and you do them all;
- . • Write a vision for your relationship that you can refer to frequently – this will help you to be guided by your heart and the big picture, rather than the short-sightedness that can result from the fear you may be feeling;
- . • Get some support in place to help you on this journey. Remember, we can’t do anything of great importance to us alone. If you are going to friends for support, make sure that they are 100% on board with your program. They cannot be voices that feed your ego/fear-based self.
- . • Last, but not least: pay attention to all the ways he responds to your new program...I’m sure he’s going to find himself coming up with all sorts of ways to show his love for you!

IN CONCLUSION Intimate, committed relationships are the most perfect vehicles for us to become, as I call it, “undefended”: to consistently BE our highest and best selves...to have the courage to be guided by our hearts, and to be able to reveal the depth of our love. I trust that this will turn out to be one of the greatest gifts to your relationship. If you so choose, this could be a powerful catalyst to take you both to a place where you

feel safe, loved and full of joy.
LOVING YOUR BEAR

Dear Karen,

My husband comes home like a damned bear fairly often – really argumentative, belligerent, and hard to deal with. I can't seem to figure out how to get him to stop. Any ideas? ~ Sue

Dear Sue,

What a juicy question – I know every that every woman who is married to that occasional “bear” will appreciate your bringing this up!

MAN OR MOUSE? I'd say the majority of women I've worked with over the years are more attracted to the “alpha” type of man – strong, focused, directed, take-charge - out there causing big ripples in the world. With this kind of man, women tend to feel safe, protected, and more likely to trust his ability to provide for her (and her children). This drive is deep in our genetic coding, actually. It also helps to explain why women often find it hard to be (or stay) attracted to “nice” men.

THE DRAGON SLAYER'S BURDEN So you've gotten yourself an alpha male. Good! Now let's get you to a place where you can consistently see that as great news.

Let me point out one thing that I believe is going on here with your guy: like most men, he probably feels extreme pressure to go out in the world – every day – and slay dragons (and other dangerous things), so that his family is taken care of. It is bound to make him grumpy at times, and he probably doesn't have too many places to show his soft underbelly (the tired, scared, mighty warrior/hunter). You want to be sensitive to that aspect of your man, don't you?

HOME AS ANOTHER BATTLEFIELD? The other thing you mentioned is that he's “argumentative” and “belligerent”. This makes me wonder what he's encountering in YOU. Generally speaking, it takes two to create “argumentative” and “belligerent” relating. If you're meeting him with a hard edge you're making things much harder for both of you. If you end up keeping him on the battleground in which he fights every day, he's likely to keep engaging with you as a warrior.

By the way, if you find this amusing, or, if you're finding yourself ridiculing this concept, you may want to examine the depth of empathy or understanding you have for your husband. He probably won't tell you, so it's up to you to imagine what he's dealing with: work issues (competition, getting promoted, layoffs, etc.), money (saving enough for colleges, retirement, any unexpected bills, vacations, home repairs, etc.), health (aging, stamina, illnesses, etc.)

In order to create a home where you get what you need, you might want to:

- . • list all of the things you like, love, admire, respect and/or appreciate about him, and read it often (and add to it!);
- . • list all of the things you have in your life because he's the way he is (gratitude and appreciation is so essential for the warrior to keep going!);
- . • when he comes home, try to remember that he's been out there in a highly competitive arena, where it is all about winning/losing, and the stakes are incredibly high (so you can be the soft landing place for him)

- . • if there is something you don't agree with, pick your timing carefully – and it probably isn't wise to choose the moment he gets home (remember, he wants to make you happy – trust that he will listen to you when he's able);
- . • let the softer and more feminine part of you relate to him; your softness and his hardness will create wonderful balance - as well as sexual energy in your relationship – and it will put a stop to the “argumentative” and “belligerent” man you see;
- . • make sure you have a good support system in place – one where you can whine and complain when you need to, and a place where you can be reminded of your commitment to honor your man.

IN CONCLUSION Masculine energy is a wonderful, sexy thing (when treated with respect) and a dangerous thing when it's not. You have it in you to inspire your man to move mountains for you – you also have the power to turn him into a grizzly bear just out of hibernation (they're pretty vicious, from what I hear!). As I often say, being in a committed relationship is one of the most powerful and effective ways for us to learn how to be our highest and best selves as women. Frankly, I can't think of a better goal in life.

HONORING THE FATHER

Dear Karen,

I don't like the way my husband is being with our daughter. He's being overly strict, and I can tell it's making her feel a little hesitant to be around him. When he goes too far, I do say something to him, but I'd like him to cut it out. How do I get him to stop being this way with her? ~ Vicki

Dear Vicki,

Thanks for sending in this question – I am sure there are mothers everywhere who share your feelings about this very touchy subject.

SOME DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN Have you ever wondered what it might be like to be a man? I think about it at times, and all I can say is, I am really glad I'm a woman! Although each gender has “stuff” to contend with, look at some of what we women typically have access to, versus men's experiences:

- . • We can express our feelings through yelling, crying, laughing, sulking, dancing, hugging, writing, having temper tantrums, (what's your favorite?) and we can

do it with friends. Men normally suck it up, go it alone, and try to figure it out by themselves (or ignore it until it goes away).

- We have the ability to work on several things simultaneously – even things that are very different and require varied energy, attention, and skill. Men tend to be more single-minded, handling one thing at a time until it's done (or until they've killed it and buried the evidence).

- We can read the most subtle shift in a person's demeanor, and understand what is going on with them. Men get an idea that there's something going on when there are sirens blaring.

- We are comfortable with sharing deeply, connecting, and being intimate. Men make a mad dash for the hills when they've caught wind of an impending "talk".

- We love, nurture and care for those we love (particularly our children), and seek partnership and help to be successful in caring for them. Men feel singularly responsible for their loved ones' success in life (particularly their children), and they often try to shoulder this burden alone.

So, what do you do with a man who is fathering a daughter in a way that you don't feel is best for her?

YOU'VE GOT THE POWER You may be right in feeling that his way of being with your daughter is not the best for her. However, I believe that being openly critical of his behavior will only get you (and your daughter) more of the same. The very first thing I suggest is that you do not correct or criticize him in front of your child. Remember, a **VERY IMPORTANT PART** of what you're doing is teaching her how to choose a good man, and then how to be in a successful committed relationship with him. Do **NOT** underestimate the importance of this; you don't want to (inadvertently) teach your daughter to disrespect men. There is a way to have your husband feel appreciated and respected, to see that your daughter is parented effectively, to feel good about the situation, and to help your marriage thrive. What I'm suggesting will take some time to implement, but it's worth that time and effort to achieve the best results for all.

Before I outline my suggestions, here are some things I believe to be true. Try these on as a foundation from which to move forward:

- Trust that you did choose the right man to have children with;
- Trust that your husband wants what is best for your child, and he that loves her more than you can imagine;
- Allow for the possibility that the way he's fathering her is beneficial to her growth and development as a person (and as a woman);
- Realize that the quickest way for a person to change is to first feel accepted as he or she is.
- You have immense power over how he feels about himself, and how he is with you and your daughter. Remembering that will always serve you well.

6 STEPS TO PARENTING HARMONY

1. Write a list of all the ways you admire, respect and appreciate your

husband, and, from that list, write him a love letter, sharing your observations and feelings about him.

2. 2. A day or two later (timing is everything – make sure you are both in the right “space” for this chat), ask him to sit with you to talk about something that’s on your mind. Once you’re settled, and ready to talk, start off by acknowledging him as a father, and share your understanding of what his challenges are/might be with your daughter.

3. 3. Acknowledge the places where you are both completely aligned in your values and philosophies as parents. Identify your shared goals for your child, and ask him if he would be open to some feedback about what you feel is going on.

4. 4. Assuming he says “yes”, very gently share with him that, although you agree completely with his point and objective regarding your daughter, you feel that his delivery method is causing his message to be lost, and you want him to be as effective with your child as he wishes to be.

5. 5. Assuming he is open to your “coaching” – again, very gently – make suggestions for how he might be softer in his approach with her. You might want to mention that you may be “oversensitive” to her feelings, and that there may be some happy meeting ground in the middle, but that you wanted to talk with him because you were feeling some discomfort.

5. 6. Ask him for partnership in coming up with some plans of action for how to handle the issues that come up with your daughter, as well as how you might both support each other when you’re not following the plan. Then follow the plan, allowing for occasional slips. Remember, change takes time.

IN CONCLUSION Your husband wants the same things you do for your daughter – that she becomes a healthy, happy, productive and successful adult, living a great life. Your approaches to that end result may be quite different, and there are great gifts in those differences. Start with appreciating them (and him), and you will find more ways to successfully address and correct those things that do not support what you both want for your child. He needs your generosity of spirit, your trust and compassion, and your love. He’ll come around. I’d bet on it.

VULNERABILITY, SELF EVALUATION AND THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

Dear Karen,

How can I stay soft and vulnerable in the face of anger, disdain or even indifference? ~ Joyce

Note to reader: Joyce (not her real name) has been successfully married for a few years. I tell you this because the advice in this column is for women who are in good relationships. If you find yourself in a new relationship with a man who is behaving the way Joyce has described, your best bet is to ask yourself why you are with him to begin with, and why you are settling for this kind of treatment. Remember, he’s on his best behavior in the beginning!

Dear Joyce,

You are wise to know that being soft and vulnerable is the key to having an intimate, fulfilling and successful relationship with a man. Great question!

SELF-EVALUATION Since I believe that we are all here on earth to learn about ourselves and to become our highest and best selves, I always suggest self-evaluation as the starting point for understanding what happens in our relationships (and lives, for that matter).

So, ask yourself what part, if any, you've played in the relationship problem. By evaluating your own behavior and taking responsibility for it, you develop the power to act in ways that create the relationships you want. You can learn from what you haven't done well, and relish the rewards of what you have done well.

If, after an honest self-evaluation, you are confident that his attitude is not a result of your actions, then you can just focus on what might be going on for him that's affecting his behavior. This approach strengthens your ability to empathize with your man, and practice giving him the benefit of the doubt. Is he going through a difficult time at work? Is he worried about a health issue, or is he dealing with financial concerns? If so, you can try to see behind the anger, to offer him love and support at a difficult time. Or, you may realize that the best action is to give him space and accept him where he is, without taking it personally.

OWNING UP TO YOUR MISTAKES If, however, self-evaluation helped you to realize that something you said or did turned him into the "jerk" he's being, then you can take measures to repair the damage.

This may be as straightforward as owning up to your part. Taking responsibility for actions is very important to men. It may mean that you need to apologize for something; this is another really important aspect of a successful relationship and something that so many people find hard to do. Or, maybe he misses your loving attention - men tend to act like bears when they need our tenderness directed at them instead of all the other places they may see it going - the kids, the dog, the job, the friends, etc.

THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT While it's impossible for you to be a mind reader, fine-tuning your "man-action-interpreter" will help you to get past his anger and see what he is really communicating. And, although it's hard to love a man when he is angry or indifferent, understanding what's behind his behavior makes it possible for you to remember your love and generosity of spirit for him.

As you can see, giving your man the benefit of the doubt is crucial to a successful relationship. When looking at his actions, remember: there is no reality - only perception, and perception is a choice. Whatever meaning we assign to an event is "created" by us.

Think about it. How many times have you acted from a negative interpretation, only to realize later that your "truth" was basically flawed? Looked at from a different perception, perhaps that "reality" could have been positive, and in your best interest.

FEAR REARS IT'S UGLY HEAD Why is it sometimes so easy to believe the worst and so hard to give someone the benefit of the doubt? I believe it's due to fear and the "self-protective" devices that instantly appear to combat it. So, when your man is angry with you, your first response, designed to protect you from pain, might be to conclude that he's a total jerk, and write him off.

Now, there are some relationships that really do need to end; however, my answer is about those unions that are committed, and basically strong and loving. It's important to recognize fear-based responses and quickly choose more loving responses. By disciplining yourself to believe the best of your man, it will be easier to control your fear-based actions in times of trouble. This technique works in all relationships that matter to you, including that critically important relationship you have with yourself. Giving those you love the benefit of the doubt is a wonderful, charitable, effective way to live.

For those of you thinking: "What if I get hurt or disappointed?" I will answer with a quote that I came across many years ago which still impacts my life: "You may be deceived if you trust too much, but you will live in torment if you do not trust enough."

DISCARDING OLD LESSONS Finally, be honest in distinguishing between when you are truly being soft and vulnerable with your man and when you are being manipulative – acting like a "victim" or blaming him to try and get your needs met. Since very early in our lives, we were all taught, directly or indirectly, ways of relating or acting to get our needs met. Some of what we learned or absorbed may not be completely effective. Again, self-evaluation can help. It enables you to see your behavior and the deeply held beliefs that are at work. Once you see an ingrained belief is not serving you well, then you have the power to stop behaving on the basis of those beliefs and to toss away the faulty lessons.

IN CONCLUSION In a committed relationship, giving your man the benefit of the doubt, looking at where you may be contributing to a challenging behavior of his, and working with your perceptions to choose to see a better story, can all support the kind of relationship you both want – and deserve.

KEEPING THE HOME FIRES BURNING

Dear Karen,

Please talk about how to keep the excitement (passion) going in a marriage. ~
Liz

Dear Liz,

Thanks for bringing up this topic – I know it's a concern for many women. It can seem so perplexing; the electric magic that once felt so natural with this man can feel elusive...or worse.

IN THE BEGINNING Passion. Excitement. Longing. Butterflies in your stomach. Ah...the feelings that run rampant in the early days of love. And you always seem to

know exactly what to do, and when to do it, to keep the excitement at a fever pitch between you. It couldn't get much better, right?

Research has shown there is a physical basis for the feelings we experience in the early stages of a relationship. Basically, this state lasts somewhere between 18 and 36 months (long enough to ensure the survival of the race, because you should have had time to create a family by then). This magical, mystical "honeymoon period" we all love so much is biologically driven, since the beginning of man and woman.

WHOOOPS! WHERE'D IT GO? Once the first phase of your relationship has passed (and it does), you can be in quite a predicament. Your once-perfect man is now (fill in the blank). And he now sees his once-perfect woman as (fill in the blank).

You can either hope that things will go back to the way they were (they won't), or turn what was once spontaneous and "natural" into a discipline, requiring planning and effort. How romantic, right? This shift, from hormonally-driven to labors of love, is a big reason for the demise of many otherwise good, solid relationships. Once it stops feeling like it did in the beginning, we fear that we may have selected the wrong mate, and the relationship may decline.

The funny thing is, that, for those relationships that move beyond the hormone-induced passion to the deep, abiding, intimate, and trust-based passion, the quality of the connection is usually far better than the honeymoon stage. It's mature, calm, reassuring, supportive – and yes, even hot, passionate and romantic. If you want to have that type of relationship with your man, read on.

LEAVING HIM IN THE DUST Once the honeymoon stage is over, some women make the mistake of going elsewhere in search of the feelings of excitement and/or fulfillment they once felt with their man (and I don't mean going off to have an affair). This can create huge problems in the relationship. Which of these, if any, would your man say is more important to you than he is?

- . • Career
- . • Family (parents, siblings)
- . • Children (with your man, or from a prior relationship)
- . • Hobbies, volunteering, or outside interests
- . • Friends
- . • Self-care
- . • Other

These issues, when they become preoccupations (or obsessions), can contribute to the breakdown of the special connection between a man and a woman that was once there - and could be again, with a little focus.

WORK SMARTER, NOT HARDER If you're smart, and you want your relationship to thrive and feel satisfying to you, you will have to figure out how to help your man feel he

is #1 in your life. (Please notice I said FEEL like #1 – even if it is not true). This is harder to do if he really is not #1, but I'm going to guess that even if it is not true for you, you still know what to do, how to behave, and how to treat him, so that he feels as if he is very important to you. Remember, you were brilliant at it in the beginning, and could be again, with a little effort. Which brings me to the next question: why would treating your man in a way that helps him feel important be worth the effort? See if any of these appeal to you:

- . • Being that way is you at your best, so you will feel great about YOU
- . • Your man will be happier (bonus: more enjoyable to be with)
- . • You will be teaching important stuff to your kids, if you have them
- . • You get back what you give – tenfold
- . • When you “Act as if”, you give yourself an opportunity to connect to the feelings behind the act – so acting lovingly creates more love, acting sexy makes you feel sexy, etc.

There are two important ways to build yourself up to this lifestyle: 1) have a vision of what you want your marriage to be, and 2) make sure you have good support in place. “Good” support, in my book, is a place where you can get compassion, care, understanding, and firm belief in your ability to create what you want. It's not a place where you can launch an unproductive bitch session about your man.

IN CONCLUSION You can have a passionate, loving and juicy relationship with your man, even after all the hormones that define the early “hot and heavy” days have long dissipated. It will take love, vision, and discipline. And you will reap more rewards than you can probably imagine.

TEACHING AN OLD DOG NEW TRICKS

Dear Karen,

What do you do when you are not satisfied with the amount of physical intimacy your husband is willing to bestow upon you...i.e., not only sex, but cuddling, kissing, etc.? ~ Megan

Dear Megan,

If we're working from the assumption that you are already treating him like your number one priority, and you are feeling really good about the way you're being with him, then the next area to explore is how to get the physical intimacy in your marriage closer to what you'd like.

TAKING CARE OF YOUR SIDE OF THINGS FIRST It is important that we start from a place where you are being your best self in your relationship; if you are not, it is very difficult to know what is possible with your man. I say this because it is so often true that what we are getting (or not getting) from our mate is in response to what he is (or isn't) getting from us. Now, if what you just read is causing you to have a strong negative

reaction, please don't kill the messenger. I am just telling you what I have observed and experienced - consistently - about the ways men behave in their intimate relationships with women.

I cannot stress this enough; if he is not getting what he needs from you, you are not very likely to get what you need from him.

ACCEPTING THE DIFFERENCES Another issue that may be going on for you, and that needs to be acknowledged, is that there may simply be a difference in your comfort level and needs around physical intimacy and touch. Don't despair, however, if you think this is true about your situation. If all else is working, men really can be "trained" to be more successful at making you happy. It may be difficult for some men to show physical affection, but as long as they are capable, and it is worth it to them, they generally will overcome any obstacles to being better snugglers, huggers, and lovers.

THE TRAINING PROGRAM As I write this, I have to laugh; this is a virtue that would not always apply to me, but patience is key to the success of a "training" program with our men.

Here is how I suggest you map out your program:

- 1) be clear about what you may be withholding from him, and then do the work until you know you are being your best self in your relationship;
- 2) establish where you want to end up together – i.e.: you want to have sex at least (fill in the blank), you want to hug (fill in the blank), you want to hold hands regularly in public, etc.;
- 3) acknowledge all the ways he already is showing you love and affection (his way), and connect with gratitude and love for him (remember: what you focus on is what will grow!);
- 4) let him know that you LOVE it whenever he (hugs you, kisses you, makes love to you, or whatever it is you want more of). This will reinforce two things: 1) he is already successful and knows what to do; 2) you get really happy when he does this/these thing(s);
- 5) make sure you are getting your minimum requirement of touch from whatever source is going to work (hugs from friends, massages, a big cuddly stuffed teddy bear, etc.). This could apply ongoingly, as your need/desire for touch may always be greater than his ability/desire to meet it. (Of course, it should go without saying that you want to make sure you are always behaving in a way that is completely in alignment with your commitment to your man.);
- 6) pay close attention to ANY signs that the training program is working, It is more common to notice what is NOT working/happening, but it is more valuable to train yourself to see any movement in the right direction, no matter how tiny.

IN CONCLUSION This program may need to last many months (or, with very difficult partners, years), but if you have patience and love, and realize that the journey is really all about you and your growth as a woman, then there is nothing in the way of you

feeling love, joy, satisfaction and fulfillment in the process.
ROMANCE RESURRECTION

Dear Karen,

My husband has stopped doing all the romantic things he did when we were first together. I miss them, and it makes me mad! What to do? ~ Cindy

Dear Cindy,

If I'd collected a dollar every time I'd heard that complaint over the past 10 years, I'd sure have a lot of money in the bank!

LOVE IS A MANY-LEVELED THING As is usually the case in our romantic unions, there are probably a couple of things going on here...let's look at each possible element separately.

COURTSHIP BEHAVIOR Let's face it, we ALL have that behavior in the beginning. You know what I'm talking about - we show only our most attractive and positive traits (maybe even stretch it a bit?), and the less desirable "stuff" gets put in the closet.

That may feel sad to you, but consider the other side of it - you get to relax, and, to a certain extent, take the relationship for granted (in a good way). For instance, you know who will be your date on Saturday night, you have someone to join you at weddings, you have someone to lug heavy stuff, or hang things for you, or kill scary bugs for you. At some point in a good relationship, you simply bank on certain things being true, without question. It is comforting to be able to take some stuff for granted. And then there's the extreme end of that behavior that is not good for anyone, because every relationship needs sustenance, in order to survive. And the sustenance that is required is attention to your partner's needs. Since I'm "talking" with you, Cindy, and not your husband, we'll focus on you.

WHAT ABOUT MY NEEDS? Too often, I see an unhealthy dynamic being played out in relationships, which is a competition to see who is going to cave in first. I don't know if that is happening in your situation, but if it is, I don't have to tell you that it's very difficult. It wreaks havoc in your love life, and makes intimacy and vulnerability just about impossible!

If you're not sure about whether or not this is your story, here's the test: do you find yourself feeling resentful about what you do for him, or keeping score about how much you do for him, vs. how much he does for you? If this is you, watch out. It's very damaging to the union that you have together.

In the beginning, you probably couldn't do ENOUGH for this man, and all without much notice of how he was keeping up his end of the bargain (of course, he was falling all over himself to give you things, take you places, call you during the day to say mushy stuff,

and all the other things that made you feel special. At some point, it started to change. It doesn't matter who started it, it's just feeling bad now. The good news is that you have the ability to create a relationship where you have more of what you're now missing, without the rollercoaster of emotions that went with the initial stages.

GIVE WHAT YOU WANT This is an old adage, and it simply means that the best way to get what you want is to give it. It sets up an environment of generosity that usually inspires others to the same type of behavior. (Remember the movie "Pay It Forward"?) There's another benefit to this action: there's a part of your brain that is very basic and elemental, and it operates at the level of sense/feeling. It can't really tell the difference between giving and receiving – so acts of love, kindness, and generosity feel wonderful on either end. That part of you experiences the glow of that positive feeling, even if you were the giver, so you benefit from giving, on a couple of levels. Pretty cool, eh?

TEACHING HIM NEW TRICKS Now, to the other half of the equation. It's very important to realize who you're working with here, and to remember that men are genetically wired to hunt. I don't care if your guy is a CPA working on taxes until 11p every night. His genetic code is MAN.

So, what happens when a hunter has "bagged his prey"? He rests. After all, he planned his hunt for a long time, worked it diligently, and emerged victorious. He may celebrate, but then it's snooze-time. This resting period lasts until he needs to hunt again. Now, I'm assuming your man is done hunting, at least in this regard, right? So, what to do? Work with the genetic code! What can you create that is going to appeal to that part of him? If your immediate thought was: "He hunts to win, so I'll make sure he's inspired to hunt for the prize of my appreciation!", you're on the money! You see, many women slip into the dangerous habit of always taking things for granted, which is not very inspiring for men. I'd suggest you mount a campaign of appreciation for him. Start immediately, and appreciate anything and everything you can (authentically – don't BS him, or it will backfire). Share with him how (loved, safe, happy, fulfilled, content, horny, excited, feminine, warm, grateful, lucky) you feel when he (rubs your feet, takes out the trash, fills the gas tank, disciplines the kids, brings home the bacon, kills the spider, walks the dog in the rain, sleeps on the wet spot!). If you acknowledge him for already doing it, it registers for him as something he will "win" at, and he will do more of it.

IN CONCLUSION In a long-term relationship, there's the sweet type of taking-things-for-granted, and there's the dangerous type. Be very careful you haven't fallen into the latter category. This tends to create resentment, which is a real love-killer. Make sure you're always appreciating him for what he does for you, and he'll keep doing it.

YOU LOST THAT LOVIN' FEELIN'

Dear Karen,

In the beginning of our relationship, my husband and I had sex all the time! Now we've been married for a while, and he wants to have sex more than I do. How

can I get back on track so we can share that intimate fun side that was so much a part of our relationship? ~ Brenda

Dear Brenda,

Thanks for writing with such a personal and important question. You are giving many women and their men a gift by opening up this subject.

THE AGE-OLD CLICHÉ It seems to be a perpetual joke among men: "How do you get a woman to stop having sex with you? Marry her!"

Unfortunately, sex problems do surface in so many marriages...hence, the jokes. The reasons are plenty, but the consequences are nonetheless quite painful for both men and women.

Sex is one of the most fought-over, cried-over, quit-over subjects in a long-term relationship. It is absolutely critical that conflicts about sex get worked out, or you could end up out of the marriage. You may not end up divorced, but you will not have the relationship you once had and loved. The glue, the juice, the connection that you both experience when you share yourselves intimately will be gone when things are feeling hard, and you really need it.

THE CULPRITS It can be confusing and frustrating to watch your sex life fade, especially when you can't figure out why.

Here are some common causes (in no particular order):

- . • Pressure due to lack of money, work problems, caring for elderly parents, etc.
- . • Having children
- . • Hormonal changes
- . • Sexual dysfunction
- . • Built-up anger/resentment that is not being addressed and handled
- . • Getting emotional needs met outside the relationship
- . • Allowing intimate connection to drop to the end of the priority list, if it's on the list at all

HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN TO US? When you first started out together, you might have believed that you and your husband were immune to such problems because your relationship was so unbelievably good. But, you are human, and life is complicated, and lives evolve and change. You may slip into bad habits without realizing it. No matter what you believe, the passionate sex you both shared at the beginning of your relationship cannot last.

The magical connection that exists at the beginning of a relationship is, based in part on an idealized view of your partner or yourself. Eventually, the idealized version is

replaced with the flawed yet more real version of who you both are.

Even though the idealized, fantasy-ridden early phase ends, it is entirely possible (if you are committed to it) to enjoy even better sex than what you shared during the initial stage of the relationship. The reasons? Deeper intimacy and love; mutual empathy and trust; knowledge of the subtleties of each other's bodies and sexual likes and dislikes; and the profound joy knowing your mate is satisfied.

TAKING CARE Well-known author Joseph Campbell ("The Hero's Journey", as well as many others), in talking about marriage, said, "The conversion from passion to compassion is the whole problem of marriage".

What this means to me is that in order to create the marriage that you really want, it is imperative that you successfully navigate the transition from that initial stage of passion to a deeper place of compassion and empathy for each other. The definition of empathy: identification with and understanding of another's situation, feelings and motives.

When we review the reasons sex can fade in a long-term relationship, we may not see how empathy could make a difference. Let's look at a few of the "causes" we listed above, and consider the effect that empathy might have on some of the "problems" that get in the way of a good sex life.

- . • Pressure due to lack of money, work problems, caring for elderly parents, etc.: when you are able to see a situation from your mate's viewpoint, you might experience a softening of your heart and an openness to him that may have been elusive;
- . • Having children: understanding that your mate may feel left out, jealous or fearful that he's lost you/your attention and focus could inspire you to feel closer and more loving to him.
- . • Built-up anger/resentment that is not being addressed or handled: recognizing the impact your resentment is having on him and the relationship, and working to change your perception about what he did/didn't do that was causing resentment or working out the issue(s) in a loving way so you can recreate the closeness you both want.
- . • Allowing intimacy to drop to the bottom of the priority list (if it's on the list at all): it is so easy to allow every-day "stuff" to climb up higher on your list of priorities than connecting in this way with your mate. In many cases, a man's increased sexual desires really are about his need for intimacy and connection with you. Understanding that your mate might feel pretty bad about being your last priority can help you focus more on loving him and letting him know how much he matters to you.
- . • Hormonal imbalance or Sexual Dysfunction: there are times when the issue is physical or psychological, and it's important to get the appropriate professional help. Consult your doctor if you feel this is what is in your way, rather than the more common issues outlined here. You deserve a healthy sex life, and there is help available!

DO YOU THINK I'M SEXY? Another key issue: the importance of feeling and seeing

yourself as sexy, sexual, desirable and attractive. If your self-image is frumpy, or your man hasn't seen you in anything other than stained, baggy sweats for weeks, it could be hard to work up any sexual heat. Try planning a time to treat yourself as if you are a sensual, beautiful woman, and allow that part of you to rise to the surface. Find what works for you. Take a bath, dab on your favorite perfume, wear makeup, lovingly cover your body with moisturizer, and dig out that sexy number you haven't found a reason to wear. Once you've got your sensual juices flowing, look at your man and remember that he is also a sensual, sexual being instead of the tired, grumpy guy you live with. Remind yourself that you two have a depth of love and connection that is magnificent. Allow your heart to touch his heart. Then see what comes up.

IN CONCLUSION Paying attention to the intimacy in your relationship (and sex is a very important part of that intimacy) is the best insurance policy you could have. It will keep your marriage vibrant, juicy and alive. Intimacy will give you both a well to draw from when you need a relationship boost. Pretty good deal, wouldn't you say?

FOR BETTER OR WORSE

Dear Karen,

I need help. I'm finding myself being extremely judgmental of my husband's way of handling the difficulty he's experiencing right now. He's unhappy at work, and instead of doing something about it, he's moping, and grumpy, and spending all his free time watching TV, drinking and eating – and not fixing the problem! I also know he feels my disapproval, which is making things even more strained. ~
Ann

Dear Ann,

You are dealing with a difficult, although common, issue; it sounds as if your husband is handling a problem differently than you would. And it sounds as if you two are not communicating about what is going on in a way that takes care of the needs and feelings you are having.

THE CORE ISSUE You say that you're finding yourself being judgmental of the way your husband is handling a problem, because you don't think he's doing what he needs to do. My question to you is this: "How do you know he's not doing anything about it?" Just because you can't see anything happening, it does NOT mean he's not working on it. I know that my husband, Craig, does a huge amount of internal processing and ruminating before he can get into action about something. Once he's in action, though, he's unstoppable. I don't know what it would be like if he tried to push himself before he was ready, but I would bet you anything that he would produce only a fraction of what he gets done when he is ready. What would it take for you to trust that your husband is working on this issue in his own way?

LOVE AND RESPECT According to John Gottman, Ph.D., author of "The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work" and "Why Marriages Succeed or Fail," there are

two key elements to a strong and lasting marriage: love and respect. To take the self test “Is There Enough Love and Respect in Your Marriage?”, taken out of Gottman’s book, visit the Heart Matters website: <http://heartmatter.net/gottman.htm>.

I am sure that you love your husband (and I’d bet he knows it, too). Maybe it’s time to explore how much you respect him. Try asking yourself if you trust, value, accept, and honor your husband. If any one of those words catch in your throat as you say it, we may be on to something here. If the first thing that comes up for you is “but he doesn’t treat ME like that!”, all I can tell you is that you have a choice here: be right, or be happy. I will absolutely promise you one thing: whether or not he is being rotten to you now, if you launch a campaign to treat him with more respect and love, you will see it come back to you ten-fold. The only part of you that won’t like this is your ego, and that is not the part of you that you want controlling your marriage. It’s the part of us that competes, holds ourselves apart, needs to be special, requires things to be “equal”, and basically destroys the “WE-ness” that you are trying to nurture in your relationship. He needs that sense of “we” from you right now – probably desperately – but he won’t express that the way most women would; it’s up to you to know it, in your heart.

THE GIFT OF COMMITMENT You love this man, and you married him “for better or worse.” This experience could be one of the most powerful vehicles for deepening the empathy and intimacy in your marriage, if you commit to using it that way. What it will take from you is to trust your man completely (when you don’t have any proof that you should), and to accept him unconditionally (even though he’s behaving completely differently than you would).

LOVE IS THE GREATEST GIFT

A song has been playing on the radio lately with one line that I find riveting: “My salvation lies in your love.” The artist who performs this may have had a different intended message, but what I keep seeing is a man’s face, talking to his woman, asking her to understand how much he needs her love, and how much power she has over his fate.

Imagine what would happen if, the next time you felt upset or disappointed by your man, you chose to remember why you were with him, and decided to “filter” his behavior through your screen of seeing the best in him. How would that impact your behavior, and what difference would it make to him?

If all women had a clear connection to the significant difference that their actions made on their men, and how vulnerable these men were to their women, I believe many of the problems in marriages would be diminished (or solved).

For those of you who are pretty consistent with your message of love to your man, congratulations. I’m sure it’s taken quite a lot to get to a place where that is possible. On the other hand, if you (like most women) find it difficult to take the high road with your man on a regular basis, try on “acting as if...,” and show him that you love him, cherish him, accept him, trust him or whatever your challenge is, for one month (try it on – they say new habits take 30 days to become routine.) All this requires from you is taking the extra minute to really “see” his heart, his vulnerability, and his need for you to love him

unconditionally.

IN CONCLUSION Your man is going through a rough time. You married him because you believed he was the best possible mate for you. Now is a great time to trust that. It's also a wonderful time to find all the gifts that this current challenge holds for you both. Trust me, they're there.

TO FORGIVE OR FORGET

Dear Karen,

How do you handle your man doing something that you don't agree with, either morally or legally? ~ Anonymous

Dear Anonymous,

Thanks for bringing up such a juicy issue; I'll bet this will give everyone lots to think about!

This month's question takes us down two distinct paths: the first for women who are in a new relationship, and the second for women who are in a committed relationship.

WHAT ARE YOU THINKING? I will deal with the first group first by asking a question: "What are you doing and thinking? Why are you in a relationship with a man whose values are so out of alignment with yours?" Get out - NOW! This does, however, beg another question: "IS it out of alignment with how you've been living, and your values?"

You may be peeved with me right now, but I have to tell you, I find the old adage, "We don't attract what we WANT; we attract who we ARE" is often completely true. If you find yourself reacting to this question, stop long enough to allow yourself to sit with the thoughts. Examining your values and the way you live them is incredibly useful. Are you clear about your values? Are you in integrity with them, meaning that your words, thoughts and actions all are aligned? Would someone meeting you have a clear sense of your values?

If not, you would be smart to connect more strongly with your values and make sure that you are being 100 percent true to yourself. Whether you are silent or speaking, moving or still, you are constantly communicating who you are and what you want. Being true to yourself, no matter what the situation, is a great way to ensure that what you attract into your life is in alignment with the real you.

THE BEST POSSIBLE LIGHT For those of you in a serious relationship (meaning you are committed to this man and you know who he is and who you are), I will assume that his behavior is an aberration, and that he has never acted this way before. If he HAS behaved in ways that clash with your values throughout the relationship, please read the first part of this answer and think about what values you convey and why you are with this man.

For women who have worked with me, either through coaching or seminars, you know that I am a huge advocate of "giving him the benefit of the doubt." So, come up with a reason for his actions that puts him in the best possible light. For instance, you could tell yourself that, in times of high anxiety, people are capable of behavior that is abnormal for them. It won't work to create an outlandish scenario, (he's been kidnapped by Martians). Make the explanation something that is feasible, given what you know of him and what he's going through.

When you are getting ready to talk with him, make sure he's available. Nothing will clam him up faster than telling him that you need to talk right now when he's not in a space to do so. You may be scared or mad about the situation he's in, but he's probably feeling worse, and he may need some time before he's ready to be open about it with you.

Once you feel that you're in a compassionate, empathic space, ask him what was/is going on for him. Once he sees that you're not out to crucify him and that you're in his corner and willing to see his side of the situation, I bet he will feel great relief. He may feel safe enough to open up and talk about the situation.

FORGIVENESS IS A GIFT TO BOTH OF YOU Once you determine how committed you are to the relationship, and what your bottom-lines are, you can go to the next step: forgiveness.

Forgiveness is one of the most important elements of a committed relationship. Since we are all human, and, as such, imperfect, our relationships inevitably require moments of forgiveness. Of course, it's easy to forgive something when we don't feel strongly about it. It is much harder to forgive when the "infraction" is huge. The real test, and the real gift, is forgiving actions that go against our own morals or values.

Get the help you need to forgive completely so that you won't EVER use the situation as ammunition against him. You may get to complete forgiveness in a number of ways: by writing about it, meditating about it, talking to a good friend, or talking with your man. You may need help, from a spiritual leader, a coach, a therapist or some other professional. If you want the relationship to thrive, do whatever you have to do to forgive him. It won't be easy, but it will be well worth it. Some of the strongest relationships have overcome very tough problems. Remember the saying: "Steel is forged in fire."

IN CONCLUSION Let me leave you with a question: At the end of your life, what will you regret? If you choose your man well, love him, know that his heart is good, and trust him (keeping in mind that he, like you, is only human), you probably won't regret sticking by your man, and giving him the benefit of the doubt when he needed you most.
HIBERNATING MEN

Dear Karen,

I have trouble when men go "into their caves." I don't know how to balance hanging in there with nagging. Any ideas? ~ Jennifer

Dear Jennifer,

You bring up an issue that, in some ways, is at the heart of the "Mars vs. Venus" conversation. For women who don't really believe (or don't want to believe) that there are real differences between men and women exist, I suggest reading John Gray's book, "Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus". It's quite illuminating.

I always maintain (brace yourselves: this is a generalization) that we, as women, have more resources available to us than men do. We have our ability to be emotional; we have friends and family to whom we can turn to when we need to cry, whine and commiserate. We have permission to do that. Men, on the whole, tend to "buck up," go it alone, tough it out. Their cave is their sanctuary. They feel safe there, they can regroup there, and they can prepare themselves for battle (again), especially if they just lost one.

Although many women perceive these cave retreats as distancing, and wonder how to maintain closeness or "hang in there" during the hibernation periods, men actually become more available to us after they've been allowed to retreat to their caves for awhile.

We should be grateful that our men have these safe places (whether they are in a garage, attic or basement in a shared home; a man's own place or car, at work, or in the woods, etc.). They give men a way to handle being in a close, intimate relationship with us (pretty scary turf for most men).

Now, In addition to answering your question, I want to work with the words you used in your question. I hope you don't mind if I will use this to help other women learn something about one of the many reasons men go into their caves. You ask how to balance "hanging in there" with "nagging". Nagging is one of the many reasons (work, finances, health, family, etc. are some others) why men go into their caves, and I urge you to stop doing it - NOW! It doesn't work. In fact, it will never work. You may get immediate, short-term results, because your man will do practically anything to stop you from being upset, and nagging him certainly lets him know that you're upset. There is a cost, however, that you may not notice until it's too late. He will protect himself more and more over time, retreating to his cave, until you are no longer able to reach him. That, eventually, will lead to a lifeless relationship that one or both of you will leave.

To be in an intimate relationship with a man requires, above all else, a strong sense of yourself, and an ability to be with and sustain yourself, no matter what is going on around you. So, if you find that you are depending on your man's presence to make you feel good, you are probably too dependent on him for your sense of well-being. When it's going well, no problem. But when he's having a bad time (no matter what the reason, he'll still want to go into his cave), and your sense of balance is hinging on his being there with/for you, you are going to come unglued. Now you've got two people who feel pretty tapped-out, perhaps looking to each other for help, and feeling disappointed.

IN CONCLUSION I encourage you to respect the differences between men and women, and to give your man the room he needs. Just one caution: If you find yourself more and

more drawn to a man who needs to spend 22 hours out of every 24 in his cave, you might not have enough time together to build the relationship that you desire. Then, the question to ask yourself is: "Why am I so attracted to a man who gives me so little of himself?"

DEALING WITH DISAPPOINTMENT

Dear Karen,

What are useful tips/triggers for remembering to see the best in your partner when you feel he has disappointed you? ~ Michelle

Dear Michelle,

Great question! I like the focus of it – “What can you do to remember to see the best in him?”, as opposed to “How can you get him to change?” Very good!

I am going to talk about one aspect of your question, which deals with feeling disappointed by your partner.

WIRING CONFLICTS Here is the deal: it is inevitable that you will feel disappointed by your man. I do not say this because I don't love/respect men – I love and respect men quite a lot. I say this because I know men and women pretty well. It is certain that you will sometimes feel let down or hurt by your guy, because we don't work the same way. His “wiring” is going to conflict with yours.

Some examples of how that might happen:

- . • You have hinted that the X anniversary of your first date is coming up, and he doesn't do anything about it;
- . • You have gotten a new hair style, and he does not say a word about it;
- . • You spent hours on your hands and knees, scrubbing the kitchen floor, and he walks in with his muddy boots without skipping a beat;
- . • He sees you crying in the other room, and he quietly lets himself out the back door and heads to the garage to tinker;
- . • You complain about the way your boss is so mean to you, and he asks what you might be doing to contribute to the difficult relationship.

All of these scenarios are absolutely possible between a man and a woman. Here are the corresponding reasons behind them:

- . • Men don't “do” hints well;
- . • Men don't notice subtle changes, and sometimes not-so-subtle changes, without help;
- . • Men's inability to see/notice/appreciate clean vs. dirty is legendary;
- . • Men have tremendous difficulty dealing with women's extreme emotions, particularly if there's a remote chance that they're somehow responsible;

. • Men are wired to fix problems, and are likely to be very rational and logical.

EXPECTATIONS: REASONABLE, OR NOT? So what, you may ask, is the solution to this predicament? It's simple. Do not expect your man to be your girlfriend (sharing your rich and complex emotional life), or, to be like you in the way you feel, think or operate. It is a set-up to expect that, and, in my observation, the fastest way to feel disappointed about something is to have expectations that are not realistic or reasonable.

The things that you CAN expect from your man, if you keep your expectations to these areas are:

- . • To shower you with love the way HE does it (and please give yourself - and him - the gift of learning his "language" of love);
 - . • To fix anything that needs his expert touch, or to get it fixed because he can't do it (for lack of time, of course, because he can fix ANYTHING);
 - . • To be a strong shoulder to lean on when you are tired - you need his strength when you run out of yours;
 - . • To protect you from: bad people, bugs, the cold, sadness (he will tell you jokes until you smile), heavy lifting and any number of things;
 - . • To listen to you with keen interest (as long as you have let him know up front that that is all you need; otherwise, he will offer a solution right away);
 - . • To buy you things that he thinks will make you happy.

This is just a sample of the things that your man wants to do for you, and is more naturally inclined to do, if he is getting what he needs in the relationship.

WHAT HE NEEDS FROM YOU His needs are pretty simple, really. First and foremost, he needs to be trusted, accepted and respected. He needs to be loved and cherished, and he needs to feel that love from you in a more physical way – hugs, touching, looking deeply into his eyes, smiling at him, and, of course, sex. This is a much more effective way to communicate to your man that you love and accept him. You will get the world at your feet, if he feels this from you consistently. One key thing to remember, which is critical to having a successful lifetime relationship: you must learn the fine art of forgiveness, and the grace of letting things go.

One last suggestion, getting back to your question about beginning to see the best in your man, I think it would be a wonderful idea to start (or add to, if you already do this) a "Gratitude and Appreciation" journal about your life with your partner. Make sure you are adding to it all the time, and try to remember all the great things from the beginning. Amnesia is only good when you forget the bad stuff. Ask friends and family to help you with this project, too; the collective memories could produce a wealth of contributions to your journal.

IN CONCLUSION Remember that he's a man, not a woman. Manage your expectations, and appreciate and honor what he does do for you. You will get everything that he's

capable of giving you.

Keep focusing on the things for which you are grateful. The benefits of holding an “attitude of gratitude” are nicely put in this quote from Melody Beattie, author of “Journey of the Heart”:

“Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, and confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.”

ACCEPTANCE COMES BEFORE CHANGE

Dear Karen,

My fiancée is driving me crazy – he is, in my opinion, way too involved with his family...taking care of them, spending time with them, and responding to their every need. How can I get through to him that he’s being inappropriate? ~ Cassie

Dear Cassie,

There are a few subjects that cause the majority of conflicts in relationships. One of them is the other partner’s family, whether it’s parents, siblings or children from a prior relationship (two other biggies: money and sex). So, you’re certainly not alone in your situation.

Your frustration is evident. The thing that really jumped out at me in your question was your judgment about his being “inappropriate” in his relationships with his family members.

I strongly urge you to shift your attitude about what he’s doing, if you really want this relationship to lead to a mutually-satisfying marriage (and I assume you do). This is easier said than done, though; let’s see if we can get you to a softer and more effective place with your man.

ASSUME THE BEST The first thing to remember is that he really means well; his motives and intentions are good ones, and he’s doing his best. You must trust and believe this with all your heart. If you do not I advise you to reconsider marrying him. I know this is a strong position to take, but you need to handle this now, before you’re both in a marriage that isn’t working for either of you (and frankly, that’s what I see in your future, if this doesn’t change).

EMPATHY WILL WORK WONDERS The first thing I suggest is to let yourself be in his shoes for a bit, and to try and see what needs might he be trying to fulfill in the way he is involved with (and taking care of) his family? What part of his personality is coming forth through this? Can you imagine that the parts of him that you love (his kindness, generosity, ability to provide for and protect his loved ones) might be driving his behavior with his family? I often remind my coaching clients that any strength, taken

to an extreme, can be, or create, a problem.

There may also be some deep, unresolved issues for him that he's trying to solve by being a good son/brother. The more you can see things from his perspective, without taking it personally and feeling as if he's taking something away from you (if that is what bothers you so much), the better able you will be to be his partner and helpmate in life. , He needs to feel that you're in his corner, and that you offer a soft landing place for him, when he needs it (and doesn't this describe some of what you want from him, too?). Remember the old adage: if you want something, give it.

UNCONDITIONAL ACCEPTANCE IS KEY A critical component of all of this, Cassie, is that this man with whom you want to spend the rest of your life has always been like this. He didn't change overnight. If you think he did, you probably weren't paying close attention in the beginning, or you were projecting things onto him that weren't really there.

In order for your relationship to thrive, you must accept him exactly as he is. That's not to say that you LIKE some of the ways he is or behaves, but that you accept the reality of who he is, and who he isn't.

The funny thing about acceptance is that it's one of the most inspiring and motivating places from which to start as we attempt any meaningful change. People tend to get more stuck in their old ways when they feel judged (and that includes when we are judging ourselves). We get defensive, and risking change is virtually impossible from that place.

So there you are. If you can truly accept your fiancée just as he is, the chances of his being willing to do things differently with his family are dramatically increased (you just can't make it a condition of your accepting him, because then it's not acceptance at all!). When you can honestly say that you:

- . • Believe his motives and intentions are good, and that he's doing his best;
- . • Have "walked a mile in his shoes" and feel empathy for him;
- . • Are 100% in his corner, and telling him so with your words and actions;
- . • Unconditionally accept all of who he is;

you probably wouldn't need to ask this question any longer. You will have figured out a way to support him in his relationships with his family members that works for both of you, and your relationship will be built on a solid foundation that can withstand whatever troubles arise. Keep me posted on your progress; I'd love to hear how it goes.

IN CONCLUSION When a man feels believed in and unconditionally accepted by his woman, he's more likely to work toward changes that will support the success of the relationship (as long as he doesn't have to compromise who he is).

HELP THEM HEAL AND YOU WILL, TOO

Dear Karen,

I want to know how to handle all my negative feelings (jealousy, anger, possessiveness, etc.) whenever my husband has to be involved with his ex-wife and their kids at family events and stuff. We don't have children together. ~
Mimi

Dear Mimi,

This is a subject that is quite familiar to me. My husband's children were quite young when he and I started dating in 1992 (the kids ranged in age from 5 to 9). In my process of adapting to Craig's status as a father, I learned quite a bit about myself, and got to heal some wounds I didn't even know I had.

HIS LOVABLE QUALITIES I'm going to guess that some of the qualities that you love about your husband also make him a great father. Even though you didn't have kids together, those qualities are part of what attracted you to him, and they are part of the challenge that you're facing right now. His loyalty, his dedication and devotion, his generosity, his sense of responsibility (probably even guilt), his willingness to sacrifice for the children, his seeming endless patience for the demands of the ex- and the kids...if they were focused on you, you'd be in heaven. But, they are not. By the way, this issue is a big one for many, many of my clients. Women who get involved with men beyond a certain age have a greater likelihood of dealing with ex-wives and children from an earlier marriage. So, you're in great company!

HE IS WITH YOU, NOT HER There are a few important things for you to keep in mind through this time:

- one of your most important jobs as your husband's life partner/woman is to support his efforts to be the father he really wants to be to his children;
- keep in mind that he's married to YOU, and that he divorced the mother of his children; remind yourself that he feels lucky to be able to come home to you after a hard day of interacting with her and having to "keep his game face on";
- the more your husband trusts you in your partnership (and the motives behind your input), the more likely he will be to let you in and take support or guidance from you;
- since we always marry our perfect teachers, keep looking for ways in which you are being called to be your highest and best self through all of this;
- this will all be over some day, once the kids grow up – make sure you have no regrets about how you were, once you get to that point.

THE HEALING POTENTIAL According to Harville Hendrix, author of "Getting the Love You Want", we choose partners because, subconsciously, we believe that they will be able to parent us the way we've longed for (since we were children, basically). In other words, we want our mate to make up for ways in which our parents failed us/let us down, so we can finally feel worthy and whole. The reason I bring this particular thing up is because that was my learning/healing in the early stages of my relationship with my husband. I felt those feelings of jealousy, possessiveness/anger that you describe. It was rooted in my feeling that his kids were getting in the way of my getting the love and

attention that I was supposed to be getting from him. When I looked more deeply into what was going on for me (with the help of the therapist I was seeing at the time), I could see that I felt very young and helpless when I was reacting to his kids' need for his time/love/attention. Once I saw that, I was able to at least ACT like an adult – and do a better job of managing my emotions – until I could integrate what I was learning. Then I was able to look for the love and attention I needed in a way that was more honest, more appropriate, and ultimately more effective.

YOU ARE THEIR ROLE-MODEL One last point I want to make, and I feel very strongly about this, is that you have an opportunity to help his children learn something that I doubt they learned with their parents – namely, what a successful, loving, supportive, compassionate relationship between a man and woman looks like. You are always teaching by the way in which you live your life; your actions are more powerful than your words. Maybe, the next time you're "seeing green" because you're feeling jealous, you can remember that you have the best part of the deal. You are married to the man you love, and you have the ability to impact his children in a very positive way. Everyone else in this situation is dealing with quite a bit of emotional baggage. It may be hard to remember that when you're in the middle of one of those family events, but try to get to that place of appreciation as soon as you can. You will feel better, your husband will be thankful, and you will continue to be a powerful influence for everyone on this journey of healing from divorce.

IN CONCLUSION In your deep wisdom, you have married a man who will help you to heal where you are wounded, and give the profound gifts you have to give...to him, to his children, and to your community.

WHEN A MAN LOVED A WOMAN

Dear Karen,

Why do divorced men who are in good long-term committed relationships with another woman feel they have to buy their ex-wives gifts? Is this appropriate? ~ Valerie

Dear Valerie,

I'm delighted that you're in a good, long-term, committed relationship. And you are virtually guaranteed to learn the most profound lessons about yourself, being intimately connected with a man. How exciting!

Before I address your question, I will mention to the other readers that your man had children with his ex-wife. I will also assume that you have done the necessary work to choose the right man for you, and that you want to continue to develop this relationship towards marriage.

HIS EX DOESN'T FEEL "EX" ENOUGH The situation you shared, where your man is behaving in a way that may feel a bit "off" to you – and buying gifts for another woman

could certainly trigger those feelings – is delicate. You may feel really upset about the fact that your guy is still connected to his ex-wife in this way, but you will be more effective at getting him to look at his behavior if you are not judging him for it, or taking it personally. It is ALWAYS best to have him feel that you are on his side. So, no matter how tempted you are to tell him that you think his actions are inappropriate, insensitive, unproductive, frustrating, stupid, or whatever else you think they are, you MUST curb your urges until you know that you are being effective at being his partner.

GREAT MEN MAKE GREAT FATHERS I think the most important piece of information about the situation is not that he's buying gifts for his ex-wife. I believe it's the fact that they have children together. It has been my experience, time and time again, that when men feel that their relationship with their kids is controlled by their ex (and really, when is it NOT?), and that the relationship could be threatened in any way, they will do ANYTHING to stay in the good graces of the woman who's holding the strings. And don't for one second believe that they enjoy this. What man is going to like being hamstrung like that - having no control over such an important part of his life?

Men's feelings about their children are very deep and very profound, and few of them show it in a way that women recognize as love and devotion. You would be well-advised to acknowledge his love for, and amazing commitment to, his children. Choose to see that he is being a Rock of Gibraltar, and continuing to relate to his ex in a way that supports his having access to his kids, no matter how he feels about eating crow. How would it feel to be in awe of his self-control and mastery, and to have huge respect for him?

HIGH SELF-ESTEEM IS THE KEY

In order for you to be successful in a relationship with a man who is divorced with kids, you must be able to manage your self-esteem, so that it doesn't end up "driving the bus", as I like to say. You know when that jealous, possessive, angry, competitive, judgmental, or controlling part of you takes over? That is when your ego has snuck in and taken over the wheel. You are now headed wherever that limited-vision part of you wants to go. Oddly enough, as often as low self-esteem/ego takes over the driving and heads over an embankment, or causes us to crash, we seem to have short-term memory loss about it. It's as if we can never remember that, the last time we felt like this, we went off the road!

When you choose a man who has kids with another woman, you need to be able to hold yourself in very high regard, to trust that you are the woman he loves and wants. You need to be okay with not feeling like his number one priority all the time. Until the kids are much older, you will most likely have to deal with your man's strong feelings (anger, hate, fear) for/about another woman.

IS HE REALLY OVER HER?

In some cases (hopefully not yours), the man you love still has feelings for his ex. If he

loved her deeply, and she was the one who left, it will take him a while to be ready to move on completely. He may even have a bit of a desire to keep the connection going so that he can ultimately get vindication – he may harbor some fantasy in which she finally sees the error of her ways, and wants him back. At this point he gets to say, “Sorry, but I’m in love with someone else – too late!” If in your heart you feel that this is the case with your man, you may need to do some work together to find out where he is emotionally. And, if you feel that he can’t give you what you really want, you may need to move on. Be careful here, though - don’t be too quick to decide that this is the situation you’re in. I’d recommend that you do a very thorough inventory of your own stuff first. Is he reflecting your lack of availability, commitment, and love in the relationship? Before you leave a good relationship, make sure that you are clear about what is really going on. As I said earlier, you will learn the most profound lessons about yourself in a committed relationship with a man.

CONCLUSION

Men have very deep feelings for their children, and they often have a tough situation on their hands when their relationship with their kids is controlled by their ex. It can cause all kinds of behavior that can seem “inappropriate”, to use your term. It will take your consistent high self-esteem to handle the situation in a way that keeps you and your man connected – and on the same side of the fence.

Remember, the kids will be older someday, and that means his ex will not be part of the picture. If you have stuck by his side, and helped him to navigate the tricky road he’s on, you will have his eternal devotion and gratitude. I bet his kids will feel this way about you, too.

Finally,

I’m sure you’ve noticed that I’ve repeated many concepts throughout this book, including my belief that we always have a choice about how to perceive the events of our life. I learned this on my own relationship journey, which had its share of challenges along the way (or opportunities, as I like to call them). I know firsthand the work that it takes to end up in a committed, fulfilling, respectful, intimate and loving marriage. I therefore want to close by sharing a personal experience with you. It concerns, me, my husband, and the power of perception.

On June 6^{th, 2004}, my husband Craig was hospitalized with what turned out to be Necrotizing Fasciitis (common name: “flesh-eating bacteria”).

Although he eventually recovered nicely with the help of a large team of medical professionals at Mass. General Hospital (an amazing institution!), it was a harrowing experience. It was also, in so many ways, an unbelievably wonderful experience – and continues to be.

PERCEPTION IS A CHOICE I could have gone down a very dark path when Craig's life-threatening illness struck; I could have asked why this could happen to us, I could have cursed fate, I could have imagined the absolute worst outcome. Instead, I was very intentional about choosing to look for, and find, the gifts in what was happening. It was quite challenging at times, but it is a commitment I made to myself many years ago – to always look for the gifts in things, because they are always there. Even when my mother died in 1991, I turned my thoughts to looking for the gift(s) in her passing. They were abundant, as they were with Craig's illness.

THE GIFTS Here are all the gifts, reminders and lessons I've been able to identify, so far:

- . • If you don't go after what you really want, you sometimes get help from the universe to get unstuck;
- . • Expressing the depth of love that you feel does not hurt;
- . • Trust is always a choice that is available;
- . • People are always doing their absolute best;
- . • One of the most profound ways to let someone know that they matter to you is to let them give to you;
- . • Being generous with kindness, acknowledgment, time, and caring is incredibly energizing;
- . • Underneath our exterior wrapping, and regardless of our life experience, we all care about the same things;
- . • Dignity is everyone's birthright;
- . • Never judge or discount someone's ability to have a deep impact on you, or your ability to impact others;
- . • Perception is a choice, and our perception creates our reality;
- . • There is always something to be grateful for;
- . • It is great to be alive – and it is not to be taken for granted.

It is my sincerest wish that you have found help, inspiration, hope and laughter in these pages.

Thank you, and may you enjoy a life filled with love.

Karen Jones

Recommended Reading Note: All the books are linked to Amazon.com for easy research (and purchase), if you are interested. These are all books I've read and highly recommend; it is by no means an exhaustive list of books available on the subject of successful relationships with men.

Dating

Are You The One for Me? by Barbara DeAngelis, Ph.D.

Finding the Love of Your Life by Neil Clark Warren, Ph.D.
Keeping the Love You Find by Harville Hendrix, Ph.D.
Mars and Venus on a Date by John Gray, Ph.D.
Men are Like Fish by Steve Nakamoto
Men Like Women who Like Themselves by Steven Carter and Julia Sokol
Smart Women Foolish Choices by Dr. Connell Cowan and Dr. Melvyn Kinder
The Surrendered Single by Laura Doyle
What Men Want by Bradley Gerstman, Christopher Pizzo and Rich Seldes

Involved (of course, the books under Married would also be great reading!)

Getting to I Do by Patricia Allen and He's Scared She's Scared by Steven Carter and Julia Sokol
The Hard Questions by Susan Piver
Undefended Love by Jett Psaris, Ph.D. and Marlana Lyons, Ph.D.
Women Men Love Women Men Leave by Drs. Cowan and Kinder

Married

Divorce Busting by Michele Weiner-Davis
Getting the Love You Want by Harville Hendrix
His Needs, Her Needs by Dr. Willard Harley
How Can I Get Through to You? by Terrence Real
Lasting Love by Gay Hendricks, Ph.D. and Kathlyn Hendricks, Ph.D.
Passionate Marriage by David Schnarch, Ph.D.
Relationship Rescue by Phillip McGraw, Ph.D.
Smart Couples Finish Rich by David Bach
The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands by Dr. Laura Schlesinger
The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work by John Gottman, Ph.D.
The Sex-Starved Marriage by Michele Weiner-Davis

General Interest

A Woman's Self-Esteem by Nathaniel Branden
Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway by Susan Jeffers, Ph.D.
The Power of Intention by Dr. Wayne Dyer
The Success Principles by Jack Canfield
Write it Down, Make it Happen by Henriette Klauser