

2003 Foreword: I have edited the 1995 version to remove some of my particularly personal preferences, yet retaining the central concept, which may be of general value to others. I've found that others often find these ideas interesting when they come up in social discussion; this edition is prepared to outline the basic concepts while preserving a fig leaf of privacy for myself and my wife-partner, Susan.

1995 Foreword: The first version of this piece was written in early 1994. In the ensuing year, I have learned a few things:

1. Love takes time.
2. You can't create love where its essential ingredients don't exist.
3. Red flags are often obscured behind clouds of passion.
4. Commitment is a discovery about our feelings for each other, not a decision that can be made before we know each other.

Still, the ideas I formed and expressed a year ago remain largely valid. Perhaps my approach to implementing them will in future be tempered by these learnings, to the benefit of all concerned. That said, here's the original piece, lightly edited. If you care to study it carefully, with multiple attentive readings, you will know a lot about me!

*Compatibility Factors:  
A Rational Guide to Choosing a Life Partner*

I have concluded, after a 3-year post-divorce romance with the ideal of blissfully stress-free singlehood, that the quality and depth of emotional intimacy that I need, and am capable of, to feel fulfilled and happy can be found only in commitment to a well-chosen life-partner. I have relished the delights of freedom-from-commitment that are available to a forty-something reasonably attractive man, and one who has been described (by an old lover and current dear friend) as having "exceptional relationship skills." Nevertheless, while this single phase of life continues quite satisfactorily, I want more.

Consequently, I am undertaking to apply what I've learned these 48 years about who I am and what I need, as well as what I've learned professionally about problem-solving, decision-making, and marketing, to search for my life-partner. Since I intend to spend the remaining 50 years of my life with her, it is exceedingly important that she and I enter our commitment with maximum information about each other, and with minimal ambivalence. So, this "search guide" represents my current, albeit continually developing, understanding of the components of compatibility that we would need to find in each other to have confidence that we will be happy together for the rest of our lives.

I share these understandings in a spirit of candor and directness, so that if the eyes of my future partner fall upon this page, she will know much about me. With this information she can assess our compatibility from her perspective and assert her interest in exploring us further.

## Compatibility Factors

It seems to me that there are four key "compatibility factors" and one "master factor." The compatibility factors are qualitative in nature -- "more is not necessarily better." That is, one's preferences are neither good nor bad -- only similarity is good, dissimilarity is bad. The master factor, however, is quantitative -- "more is better."

Although I share here my personal preferences within these factors that I think will result in optimum compatibility, I remain open to discovering that a match may be found despite some dissimilarities that might at first seem troubling. Still, I believe that the more alikeness exists between us on these factors, the more compatible and happy we will be.

1) Friendship. I want my life-partner to be my best friend. Such a friendship takes time to develop, but I am alert to the "chemistry" that attracts me (non-sexually) to some people (male and female) more than to others. That attraction includes shared values/interests/life experiences, intellectual parity, mutual liking and admiration, recognition of each other's special qualities, similar energy levels, and simply enjoying being and talking together. Conversation is easy and unforced, interest in each other is high, and we support each other emotionally. We feel liked and accepted by the other for who we are.

Much of this chemistry must be experienced to be known, and so is resistant to rational description, although some of it may be measurable by personality instruments like the MBTI. Some describable similarities that are of particular interest to me are mentioned below.

Chances are we would share:

Non-sexist "feminist-masculist" views of gender roles, meaning that we have grown beyond romanticized images of "love" that would require me to act the role of "white knight protector" for her to feel secure in her femininity, and that would require her to act the role of "helpless/dependent princess" for me to feel secure in my masculinity. We should love and respect ourselves enough, in both our feminine and masculine parts, that we can escape that popular neurotic symbiosis that provides so many partners such fleeting and superficial intimacy. My best friend must be a real grown-up, or at least on the path toward mature androgynous integration, which is all I can say about myself.

Intellectual curiosity, so that we can share stimulating conversation about anything that can be thought about. Any subject can be interesting to the intellectually curious person. Having this alikeness, we can entertain ourselves with conversation in even the most mundane circumstances, which would bore the less curious.

Commitment to health and fitness. I doubt that I could be good friends with a smoker, and I certainly wouldn't live with one. Too, I would have trouble joining in a life-long partnership with a person who is not committed to maintaining her health and fitness, including exercise and food-consciousness.

Humor. Laughing together is a special pleasure and a powerful intimate connection. For me, a shared sense of humor is an essential ingredient of friendship.

2) Sex. I've learned that fulfilling, satisfying, healthy, playful, lusty, unselfconscious, sensuous sex is vitally important to me, although I may be risking political incorrectness by asserting myself so plainly here. Our anti-sex culture, while using it to sell beer and deodorant, seems to regard sex as a lower animal need that properly christianized people should be able to happily repress. I choose to accept, even cherish, my animality, in my sexuality and in other ways, and want my life-partner to be similarly natural.

3) Lifestyle. I want to share life with my partner to the fullest, and can anticipate some life-style barriers to this compatibility:

Cohabitation. Although I can dimly imagine a satisfying lifestyle in which we do not live in the same home, I have been conditioned to believe that the intimacy that I want can only occur by sharing day-to-day living. Barring some epiphany about this, I anticipate sleeping in the same bed every night.

Careers. I am fortunate that my career provides lots of flexible time. I enjoy my work, feel that I make a useful contribution to the world, and intend to continue doing so for as long as I am able. However, I am not driven to achieve any particular career goals -- quality of life means more to me than do additional professional achievements -- and I want to share this priority with my partner. So, I would have difficulty enjoying day-to-day living with a partner who devoted the bulk of her energy and time to her career, saving only their crumbs for me.

Money. I have redefined my relationship to money in recent years. I am financially comfortable, by my own modest standards, but am by no means wealthy. And, I am unwilling to work hard/long enough to acquire wealth (although I'm exploring ways to work "smarter" to produce more income without additional time commitment). Fortunately, I do not have expensive tastes nor a need to own costly status symbols. A portion of my income is made passively via publishing of intellectual property and sale of rights. I do not want to let the time demands of fee-for-service consulting engagements infringe greatly on my quality of life, which will involve sharing time and experiences with my partner. Also, I doubt that I would be expected to financially support my partner, as I would not expect her to support me -- she will be professionally successful in her own right. We may eventually choose to pool resources, but I've not observed that doing so typically improves relationships. So, we will regard ourselves as financially self-supporting, and we will hold somewhat similar values about how we choose to spend money.

Children. I have one daughter and two surgically interrupted vas deferens; Susan, age 21, is the most precious person in the world to me, and will be my only progeny in this life. I am fairly sure that I don't want to take on the responsibility of being a live-in dad for another's young children. So, I anticipate that my life-partner will not be a custodial parent, and does not see children in her future.

Travel. My career affords lots of opportunities for domestic and international travel, but my appetite for lengthy solo trips has dropped off precipitously. I enjoy going to distant and exotic places, but want to share those history-building adventures with my partner. Her expenses could usually be charged to the client; in any case I would like for her to have the time flexibility and the interest in traveling to take advantage of these opportunities.

Where to live. I like living in Kansas City but am not bound to it. I am mobile professionally, being able to do what I do from anyplace in the United States and from some places abroad. Also, I'm flexible about urban, suburban, and rural lifestyles. So, I could be very accommodating to my partner on this matter.

Together-time. I don't require much formal entertainment to be happy. I enjoy about anything -- concerts, theater, ball games, movies -- but my preference is to not spend a large amount of money on these activities nor to live a rushed, hurried life to include them. I like simple pleasures -- dining together, evenings with friends, weekend jaunts, making music together (I play guitar and sing folk songs with vocal harmony), giving and receiving sensual full-body massage, cuddling. I'm open to learning about and adapting to my partner's desires and preferences about spending together-time, and to discovering new ways together -- these are the preferences and habits that I bring to our beginning relationship.

4) Baggage. In popular American vernacular, "baggage" has come to mean the negative psycho-behavioral effects of painful experiences in our pasts. Paradoxically, both wisdom and craziness result from hitting bumps along the road of life. I've hit my share, although I am lucky and deeply grateful to have experienced a nurturing family-of-origin that taught me that I am lovable, likable, worthy of respect, and "OK." I regard myself as more wise than crazy, having experienced my bumps in life mostly as "learning experiences" rather than as scarring traumas. Likewise, I want my partner to be wise, not traumatized. She will not be carrying a burden of floating ever-present fear, anxiety, anger, or distrust -- especially toward men -- that keep her defensive, distant and emotionally inaccessible. While such a person is as deserving of love as anyone, I choose not to complicate my life by selecting a life-partner who suffers these emotional scars.

#### The Master Factor: COMMUNICATION

Our ability to communicate will determine how satisfactorily we are able to manage the inevitable differences we will encounter in these compatibility factors and in other aspects of ourselves. Despite how much compatibility we begin with, our relationship will not remain static; as individuals and as life-partners we will be dynamic, changing, and growing -- I would not want it any other way. Parts of us will emerge that will necessitate our negotiating in search of common ground on divergent values, needs, and priorities.

Even more importantly than to manage our differences, our ability to communicate will determine the depth of connectedness and intimacy that we can find together. It is my desire that we plumb the awesome profundity -- to co-travel the "inner space" -- of our relationship as far as we are able. I hope to find a partner who shares this sense of opportunity and exploration with me.

To make a good team for the trip, we need to have three communication capabilities:

#1: Self-awareness. Many of the emotions that birth our behavior never rise to consciousness, owing to their often-painful origins in early life and to the ego-defenses that maintain their denial. Nevertheless, knowing what we feel must precede being able to express our feelings constructively, avoiding acting them out destructively. I constantly learn more about my emotional undertow, and am committed to exploring it further. I ask that of my life-partner as well, and will lovingly support her self-exploration as I want her to support mine.

#2: Ability to express. There exist knowledge, skills, and tools that can be used to express feelings healthily. Some examples:

- ❑ Knowing what "acting out" means
- ❑ Knowing what "owning our perceptions" means
- ❑ Knowing how to regard our "feelings as objective data"
- ❑ Gender (sex-role) undertow, both genetic and acquired.
- ❑ Listening with the "heart," not just with the ear
- ❑ Assertiveness (claiming our personal sovereignty)
- ❑ Resolving ambivalence through dialogue
- ❑ Reflexive fight/flight (power-play and distancing)
- ❑ The "mediator's attitude" of non-adversarial search for common ground (non-competitive negotiation)

These are some ideas, skills, and tools that I currently know about and practice to the best of my ability. Others certainly exist, and I have much more to learn and greater skill to achieve. I anticipate that my life-partner will be already somewhat knowledgeable and skillful in communication, and, like me, is open to learning more as we grow as individuals and as a relationship. Yet I also recognize that I may meet someone who, although not formally or professionally trained in interpersonal communication, will be a "natural" due to having been raised in a psychologically healthy family, to innate talent, or to some other way of knowing.

#3: Courage. I have observed that the greatest impediment to healthy communication is not the absence of skills, but the lack of courage to use them -- to "do the right thing." Communicating about what deeply matters to us in our relationship inherently exposes our vulnerability -- we risk disapproval, rejection, humiliation, withdrawal of love, having our needs left unmet. I am committed to a truly intimate relationship, not just one of convenience. (Relationships-of-convenience can be readily had as a single person, thereby avoiding the sacrifices and dangers inherent to commitment -- I have decided I want more than that.) So, I want my partner to have the open-heartedness, the strength, the integrity, the commitment to her personal growth, the trustworthiness, and the courage to trust me that are necessary to push back the envelope of our defensiveness and explore the inner reaches of our intimacy. We will be eager, even if fearful, to learn together the sometimes hard lessons that our intimacy can teach us, to appreciate expression of vulnerability as a strength in a whole healthy person rather than as a weakness in a defective one. This is not a naive trust, but one that continuously builds upon discoveries of each other's demonstrated trustworthiness. I am humbly imperfect, and am capable of acceptance and compassion for the imperfections of

others. Maintaining the environment of mutual trust and "unconditional positive regard" that can support risk-taking would require that my partner and I accept each other -- warts and all. Each of us must be committed to building that environment, and must have the courage to expose our warts.

Where is "love" in all this?

"Falling in love" -- that delicious combination of sexual chemistry, friendship chemistry, and accidental timing that may happen only rarely -- is reportedly due to the production of the hormone phenylthylamine -- what Dr. Diane Ackerman calls in *The Natural History of Love* the "infatuation chemical." Mature love (controlled by a set of opiates she calls the "attachment chemical") may not have to begin with "falling in love," but it would be delightful if it did so. Mature love arises from building history together, from communicating intimately, from learning of the other's integrity and character and trustworthiness and capacity to genuinely care, from our reciprocated open-heartedness. I don't know yet whether I will immediately "fall in love" with my life-partner; but I am quite sure that mature love between us will grow if we select each other carefully and with clear vision of our compatibility as friends, as sexual partners, and as co-travelers on the road of life, and with special attention to our ability to communicate. We'll see.

2003 Postscript: Susan and I met in 1995. I shared this document with her on our second meeting. Unlike other women I had met and with whom I had shared this, she did not politely excuse herself to escape this romance-challenged fellow. Rather, she found my ideas congruent with her own, and my interests and values similar to hers. We hosted a "family joining party" (a.k.a., wedding ceremony) on July 1, 2000.

