

Relationship Advice on Why Relationship Deal Breakers Hurt You



by Terri Trespicio for GalTime.com

You've got dealbreakers. We all do. But what should be just a few hard-and-fast, values-driven rules about who you will and will not associate with, let alone date, has gotten a little out of hand. Curly hair? Dealbreaker. Have kids? Dealbreaker. Don't have kids? Dealbreaker. Glasses, a few credits shy of a bachelors degree, a previous marriage? Dealbreaker. Seriously?

Dealbreakers masquerade as conviction, but also handily counter your fear of rejection (*I reject you first*). They also make you feel in control in an area where you feel greatly out

of control. If you spend a ton of time worrying about what you WON'T do or refuse to meet, well, you're busy putting limits on your learning and your loving.

How do you know your dealbreakers are running amok? Ask yourself this: Does a new one rear its head every time you meet someone you could potentially date, maybe someone who has an interest in you? Do you find yourself bragging about who you would not, could not, will not ever consider? Your white-knuckled grip on your dealbreakers makes you seem smart and tough, but really, it's you being judgy and scared and anything but open. It's easy to have rules. It's not easy to take risks.

What astonishes me is that the people with 101 dealbreaker clauses are the *same* ones who bemoan the loss of romance and spontaneity in dating. Where do you think that spontaneity comes from? Being open to things that surprise you.

How many times have you heard someone say that, "Well, Hank didn't seem like the kinda guy I'd fall in love with, but here we are 10 years later!" Or, "Sally wasn't really my type, but I was drawn to her and couldn't explain why." I know why: Because neither love nor chemistry keeps a to-do or a to-don't list. But you do.

Keep Dealbreakers in Check

It's worth saying that there ARE such things as real dealbreakers, but for them to matter, they have to stand for something. I'm not saying you should throw all caution to the wind and date willy nilly. I know: You have goals. Maybe you want to be married, have kids, or get out of Delaware. OK, fine. But again, are you a romcom screenwriter or are you a real person in real life? You're not casting a role; you're looking for a person with whom you can connect and share. And if you're ruling everyone out because of what you THINK that person would do, when you have no way of knowing, you're part

of the problem.

There are pretty straightforward dealbreakers: Someone who beats, abuses, mistreats you or anyone else in his or her life. Someone who hates gay people or any other race or creed besides his own. Someone who has unaddressed substance abuse problems (note I didn't say who *ever* had substance abuse problems). But anything short of a strong value-centered issue, I think you're crazy to rule out. You just don't know. So don't pretend you do.

Choose a Wild Card

So when I coach people who are looking to start up or ramp up their dating lives, I tell them to consider at least ONE wild card. This means anyone you might not perhaps usually consider. Maybe he's under 6'0 or an artist or divorced. Or maybe she's a curvy blonde lawyer with a kid when you'd only dated tall, rail-thin brunettes.

I didn't say you have to build a life together—but you can meet for a drink.

And despite what you may think about divorced people with kids, you could fall head over heels for one. I did. For years I dated a divorced dad—and wouldn't change that for the world. I learned things that I take with me into relationships with single and divorced men alike. (More on why men with baggage are well worth exploring.) I'm continually challenging my own dealbreakers, and if you were smart, you'd do the same.

For instance, if you'd told me a few years ago I'd be dating a young musician from Bushwick who sleeps on an air mattress and doesn't own a toaster, I might have rolled my eyes and said "yeah no thanks." And for a moment that would make me seem all world-weary and wise. But what I have instead is someone who excites and intrigues me, someone who is bite-your-fist sexy and incredibly fun and fulfilling to spend time with.

Take that, dealbreaker.