

The Good, Bad and Ugly of Dating Advice Guides



By Sarah Showfety

What can be gained from reading twelve dating advice books in a row? Some valuable insights, actionable information and after a while – a headache.

After years of false starts and flame-outs, I decided to give myself a dating education, buying half the self-help section at Barnes & Noble to try and change my luck in love. I thought quick salvation lay in their pages. I thought if I put on my Love Lab Coat and followed instructions, fruitless years of speed, blind and online dating would be swiftly rewarded with a marriage-minded man.

Wrong! The books did work, but not in the way I thought they would.

The Upside of Dating Advice

How did these dating books help? For the first time, I saw clearly the mistakes I kept repeating. These included being overly available, letting things ramp up too quickly and intensely (hence, the aforementioned flame-out), reacting emotionally if a guy pulled a Houdini and then reappeared, and pretending I was content to casually hang out when I craved a committed, exclusive relationship.

They gave me a toolbox of quick, easy tips to increase the quantity of men in my life. I learned where to go, how to use body language, what (not) to say. I learned to flirt better, keep first dates short, go places without a girl posse and decide what time I'd come home before a date started.

The books also flipped my usual story on its head. Through them, I saw that my poor track record wasn't due to the scapegoats I'd grown fond of blaming (men, "the scene," my parents). The responsibility lay with me – my self-perception and my choices. These were two things I could change.

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Too Much of a Good Thing

Of course, there were drawbacks, too. The more I looked outside myself for answers, the more my self-doubt grew. *Did I say what I was supposed to say? Was giving him shrimp off my plate too girlfriend-y??*

I got overly focused on following a formula and trying to do it "right." But the fear I was doing something wrong—that perhaps I was incapable of long-term romance—was the real issue. The very act of trying to "fix" myself reinforced the false underlying belief that something was wrong.

Related: [4 Steps to a Stronger Long-Term Relationship](#)

The Takeaway

What I really needed was to trust my own value – only then would I stop compromising what I wanted. So after months of following textbook rules, I *stopped* trying so hard. I let go of the pursuit and gave up worrying I'd said too much or texted too soon.

Instead, I took care of me. I meditated, hiked, swam and went to outdoor concerts at Coney Island. Only after I cultivated my own joy was I ready and able to meet the man for whom I'd been looking. More than all the techniques, I had to love me and my life first. (Which is the primary message of all the books – though it took me a while to listen).

So, do I recommend dating guidebooks? Yes, so long as they're not used as weapons of self-destruction. Skills and knowledge are important, but no amount of dating tricks will get you what you want unless you believe you deserve it.

Sarah Showfety is a New York-based life coach and author. You can read about her experiences taking dating advice in her memoir [Dating by the Books: One Blundering Singleton's Search for Love in the Self-Help Aisle](#). Connect with Sarah at her website www.straightupyou.com.