

## **The Importance of Attending to Details** **[Submitted to *Successful & Single*]**

Do you feel badly about insisting on satisfying your specific tastes and preference as you look for a potential mate? Do you feel guilty for rejecting someone because they didn't fit the bill on some measure certain folks, even you, regard as trivial -- the way they comb their hair, how they smile, the shape of their nose, their body posture, you name it?

You know this topic even if it is a touchy one for many of us. We have come to accept that paying attention to these minutia makes us shallow people, concerned with matters that we ought to bypass when we consider who might be a romantic partner, even a short term date. But, in fact, those details matter!

The reason is fairly simple but rarely spoken of: people are unique individuals with many idiosyncrasies that make them who they are. Even if some of these matters are out of a person's control - - their eye color, facial shape or body type -- they are part of the person's identity. Just as we are right to be glad about some of our inherited attributes -- the color of our hair, our cultural or national heritage, the texture of our skin or the shape of our mouths -- we can rightly insist that at least those attributes we react to strongly in others be paid close attention to.

One of the problems with many of the services singles rely upon to find dates or mates is their lack of sufficient serious attention to detail. If you have done the scene for a while, you probably know the routine: you respond to a description or even introduction but, alas, upon meeting the person you immediately notice that something is missing.

Some call it the "it," some "chemistry." What it is hasn't acquired a good common term but it has to do with details, some of which one hasn't any control over. Yet that is why many matches are a "no go" though often people feel badly in realizing it, finding it difficult to put their reasons into words or understanding why they are rejected by another when they are such fine people.

Being a fine person is usually a matter of general moral and other characteristics and in ordinary, non-personal relationships that matters and should indeed matter most. Hiring an attorney involves making sure he or she is competent and decent, never mind the details of cultural background, let alone of choice of tie or color of skirt, although even here that can be a put off. Indeed, that is what many have in mind, and rightly so, about unjust discrimination at the work place, for example, when instead of focusing on job description, we bring up personal tastes and preferences.

In personal relationships it is different. We are seeking someone who is a match for us. Being generally attractive is part of that -- as Robert Sapolsky writes in *The Sciences* (7&8/1998), "By now, investigators have a pretty good sense of what qualities are most appealing to us vertebrates, and they have found some consistencies across the animal kingdom." Then he adds, "People, for instance, can pick up incredibly subtle asymmetries in eyes, ears, wrists or ankles, and those definitely count against a potential mate." So, details matter. But as individuals we respond not just to some general traits but also to very specific, often quite unique attributes.

Nailing all the specifics down in a brief personal add or Web profile is impossible, although some clues can be provided. A picture, especially an honest one, will help, of course, because not only features but demeanor may be captured when one can see another person. (Tapes can do even more, although they tend to rely on the skill of verbal self-expression and many are at a disadvantage there, leaving those who encounter them that way misguided, thinking that's all there is or isn't to that person.)

Good matchmaking services pay very close, frank attention to this matter of proper chemistry. Still, broaching it may at times be difficult because clients do not believe they are focusing on what people deserve to have focused on. Indeed, whether someone is decent, a good parent, hard working, politically correct (as per whatever camp to which you belong) and such are often treated as the only good reasons to consider. Indeed, the shape of one's ear or jaw isn't something for which one can be credited or blamed.

But, remember, what is at stake here is to find a good match, not mainly to give recognition for achievements. When relationships ignore the details, there is a lingering unease people find difficult, probably even shameful, to identify. Not being a match in mutual appeal -- matters related to sensuality, sexuality, tone, taste, aura, etc. -- can doom them because the intimacy between partners can rarely disguise the discrepancy. But it may also seem too picky of one to care about such things. One's own tastes, preferences, likes, dislikes, peccadilloes -- how dare they matter?

Eventually this can generate irritation, annoyance and, even more importantly, deception, denial and demise. "What is wrong my love?" "Nothing." I am sure most of us have experienced the likes of this kind of an exchange. Underlying such exchanges is that suppressed dissatisfaction with another that should have been identified and dealt with from the start.

However much one may think that such details are trivial, they are a good deal of the substance of intimacy. Discomfort about such matters can sour a relationship, even ruin it. And if one is very eager to find a mate, one may ignore them entirely for a while, what with that proverbial hope springing eternal in the human heart.

None of this should be taken to disparage the more obvious and conscious values on which a match must also rest. One's ethics, religion, politics, artistic values, child rearing approach and so forth are equally germane to whether a match is likely to develop and continue. But that is widely acknowledged, indeed stressed, in our culture. What is left largely unmentioned is how important the little things are that often make us the individual person who we are.

-----  
Tibor R. Machan lives in Orange County and has written books on ethics and political philosophy. He teaches at Chapman University.