



Posted on: Thursday, August 22, 2002

## **First date: Fact-finding mission impossible?**

**By Shauna Scott Rhone**  
**Cincinnati Enquirer**

He or she said yes to that first "official" date. Now what? "You can't approach it as "tonight, I'm going to meet my soul mate," says Brian Vonderbrink, 34, "I just think that most people have lost the art of communication." More than wearing the right perfume or choosing the right outfit or even picking the perfect restaurant, the first date is a time to be honest with yourself and your date and discover the fine line between conversing and listening.

"The primary purpose of the initial date in a relationship is to create a connection," author Nina Atwood says in her book, *Date Lines: Communication from 'Hello' to 'I Do' and Everything In Between* (Henry Holt and Co., \$9.95). "Secondarily, it is to get to know someone, explore the possibility of a friendship or romance and to practice relationship skills."

What men and women talk about and how they use language as a fact-finding "power tool" tells more about who they are than what they know. "Often, men think they should display their knowledge, their expertise, to underscore their importance," says Georgetown University linguistics professor Deborah Tannen. "They use language to make sure they get the respect they deserve in order to impress" a date).

"Women use language as a two-dimensional tool," says Tannen, author of "You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation" (Quill, \$14) — both for gathering information and for sharing it. "Women do spend a lot of time listening," compared with men during this exploring phase. "Men need to be reminded that listening is good."

Communication between men and women becomes almost like a hearing condition. They talk at each other, about each other, sometimes in spite of each other, but rarely do they actually hear each other.

"The socialization between boys and girls begins between peers," says Tannen. "Boys try to be the center of attention. They compete by displaying what they know. If a girl does that, she'll be disliked. Other girls will have a negative reaction. Boys have the ability to fight through disagreements, but

girls are supposed to hide it. With their different outcomes, each thinks they're making a good impression."

While communication is important, there is such a thing as too much "communicating" on a first date, said single thirtysomething Dee Dee DeSoto of Kahala. Men and women should not talk too much about themselves, nor should they ask their dates so many questions that they seem to be prying, she said.

"Don't overdo it," said DeSoto, president of Kindred Hearts of Hawai'i Activities & Adventures for Singles. "Don't wear out your welcome ... you don't want to get tired of each other the first time."

Here's a real test: Who picks up the check? According to a survey by online dating service Metrodate.com, 44.2 percent say the man should pay, 23.2 percent say it should be paid by whoever initiated the date and 17.1 percent say the man should pay but the woman should at least offer.

"I think a good impression for a first date is for the man to pay," says Vonderbrink. "But at the same time, if a woman feels uncomfortable with that, she can buy me dinner anytime."

DeSoto said it depends on who asked. "The person who asks should be the person who pays," she said.

Sarah Hawkins of Cincinnati, 30, also said it depends on who asks. "Whenever I ask a guy out, I pay," Hawkins said. "I know he's a good person, and a good man, if on the second date he whips out his wallet before I even have a chance to see the bill. My best friends and I take turns treating each other to small things — movies, a lunch or dinner," she says. "It's fun, rewarding and completely reciprocated. Dating should be the same way."

Marta Trujillo, 25, agrees but says "if this first date is a 'set-up' by a mutual friend, then it would be appropriate to go dutch."

Single Phil Harrell, 30, says that while he thinks the instigator of the date should pay, paying may have other implications: "I feel dating disguises the ulterior motive of most dates, which is ... (a sexual encounter) at the conclusion of your date."

Certainly, first-time daters should be wary and make sure they're sending appropriate signals and watching for signs. "If the other person has the agenda of sex only," says Atwood, "you may not be able to detect that on the first date, but there are signs that indicate it. Look out for the 'sweeping

you off your feet' syndrome. 'Too much too soon' usually means a hasty exit later."

Listen for any negative talk about the opposite gender, she says, indicative of someone who won't respect you, either. "Don't think you'll convert the instant-gratification person into someone who appreciates a deeper connection," Atwood cautions. "Even if the person keeps asking you out after you have said 'no,' odds are he's just intrigued by the challenge and will disappear soon after he's gratified."

If, near the end of the date, you still feel the attraction, Atwood says, "dare to ask the person's relationship status, and be specific." You have a right to know.

As Trujillo says, "If you have no luck with a mate, then you can at least meet a new friend."

*Advertiser staff writer Zenaida Espanol contributed to this report.*

© COPYRIGHT 2002 The Honolulu Advertiser, a division of Gannett Co. Inc.