

No Time to Date?

By Bob Strauss

Unless you and your potential dates live in some mythical suburb straight out of the 1950's, the odds are that you and the people you're dating don't follow a strict nine-to-five work schedule. Perhaps you're a waitress who slogs through the 2 p.m.-to-midnight shift five nights a week, while he's a freelance writer who lies around his apartment all day in his underwear. Or maybe one of you is a corporate go-getter who works from 7 a.m. to whenever is necessary, while the other has a nice, stable, part-time job with regular hours.

The sad truth is, having vastly different schedules can be a major impediment to romance. As one of those underwear-clad freelance-writer types, I've had a hard time dealing with the fact that the women I've dated actually have to *work* for a living—and I'm sure they've had issues about my uncanny propensity to take a nap smack in the middle of a weekday, then be raring to go in the evening.

How can you and your beau navigate the rocky shoals of romance when the two of you are rowing out of sync? Here are some tips from the pros:

Take the team-training approach. Although she acknowledges that "having different schedules, especially in the beginning stages of a relationship, can take the spontaneity out of romance," professional relationship coach Suzanne Blake suggests turning this to your advantage. "Play a game of 'date tag' and see who can find the most creative way to make your conflicting schedules work," she says. "If you treat this problem as a chance to work together as a team, and if you're willing to occasionally sacrifice your own needs for the good of the relationship, it can actually help deepen the relationship and bodes well for a more mature partnership later on."

Make the most of your time together. If you and your sweetheart can only spare an hour or so for each other on any given day, don't overcompensate and try to cram in a windsurfing expedition—just do the ordinary, everyday things that couples do. "You should try to have a meal together more frequently as your schedules allow," suggests professional dating coach Toni Coleman. "If you get home at 8 p.m. and she's done with work by four in the afternoon, you can have dinner together and catch up with each other in the evening. If you have a day job and she starts in the late evening and works till 2 a.m., stop near her place of work during her break and have coffee or just a conversation."

Put yourself in the other person's shoes. Here's why it's tough being an underwear-clad freelancer who likes to date high-powered executive types: If all you have to do is crawl out of bed long enough to make a couple of phone calls and write an 800-word article, it may not occur to you that your girlfriend's job is much more demanding. Many have been the times I've waited like an eager puppy for my gal to get done with work, only to hear something like, "What a horrible day I've had—all I want to do is eat dinner and go to sleep." (Granted, that may have more to do with me than her schedule, but still...)

Clear your calendar of the little stuff. "Every person has their own 'outside the relationship' responsibilities, and it's important to take care of these so they don't intrude on your time together," says Coleman. "For instance, if you work very late and get up late in the day, leaving little time to run errands or pay your bills, don't ask your date to spend quality time doing chores with you. Instead, take a half hour before or after work each day to get the bulk of the boring stuff done, so you can have time for a romantic rendezvous afterward."

Look on the bright side. "Most romances begin with the obsession phase before they settle down into reality," says Debbie Mandel, author of *Turn On Your Inner Light*. "Sometimes things progress too rapidly before you get a chance to know your date—it's more like you fantasize or project rather than take the time to get to know who he really is. In this case, because you're being slowed down by your different work schedules, you can create a deeper, more profound friendship. You also get more of an opportunity to flirt with email, text messages, and phone calls." So next time you and your date have a hard time getting your schedules in sync, remember—it may do the two of you some good in the long run.

New York-based writer Bob Strauss is the author of the Who Knew? Hundreds & Hundreds of Questions & Answers for Curious Minds. Email him your thoughts here.