Dear Alice,

I am beginning my sophomore year in college. Last year, I was disappointed to not become friendly with any women. I have been back a week and I'm looking to turn my situation around. I would like to start dating once and for all. Any suggestions?

? More for the Sophomore

Answer

Dear More for the Sophomore,

It seems that you need suggestions not only on how to date women, but also on ways to build relationships, including friendships, with women. Fortunately, successful dating ideas are quite similar to making friends with women (or anyone). It is the building of a relationship that is significant ? asking questions, learning about someone else, and letting the other person learn about you. Since you are looking for dating techniques, you should know that there is no consistently successful way to meet people you are interested in or to "date." Risk is involved whenever you initiate an activity, suggest a cup of coffee, or ask to see someone on a date. Since you are interested in dating, you may want to think about how willing you are to take risks and put yourself "out there."

As for meeting people, on-campus, you may meet people with similar interests through clubs, study groups, classes, religious organizations, school sponsored occasions, events within your major, and extracurricular activities. These all provide opportunities to meet and get to know people, both men and women. Off-campus, standing in line at the bank, grocery store, library, and cafe or restaurant all provide opportunities to meet people and talk with them while waiting.

Some people have easier times meeting and talking with others when they're in groups, because it removes the pressure from having to begin and sustain a conversation solely on one's own. Meeting in groups creates a more casual setting to get to know people you might want to know better. Others may find groups overwhelming and prefer to have one-on-one conversations with a new friend. What makes you feel more comfortable? Do you want a friend to introduce you to someone at a party? Or would you rather approach someone after class on your own?

When you find someone you'd like to see again (for a date, or as a friend), you could tell
her/him you've enjoyed talking, and that you wondered if they'd like to get together some time. Be prepared to receive either a "yes" or "no." Regardless, what's important is not necessarily the response, but that you get the words out!

Sometimes people just beginning to date have a fear of rejection, which may make it difficult to ask someone out in the first place. It's true, sometimes the person being asked out will say "no." This may happen if the askee has no interest in dating the asker; however it may also be for some other reason, such as the asker reminds this person of someone s/he didn't like in the past. In either case, it helps for the asker to maintain her/his own self-confidence. Remember that someone (maybe more than one!) will also say "yes."

When someone agrees to spend time with you, choose somewhere you'd like to go, a place where you are comfortable and that you think your new friend would also be okay with. Since there is no way of knowing your date's taste, give two or three options, such as, "We could have coffee or tea at __________, ice cream at __________, or brunch at __________. What are you in the mood for?" You might find that spending about an hour talking and getting to know each other feels comfortable.

Ending an outing can sometimes be awkward, since it's not always clear what the next step may be. It may help to have an escape plan in mind. For example, after about an hour, you could say casually, "Well, I have some studying to do, so I can walk you back to your dorm, if you like, and then maybe we can get together another time." Or, "I'm enjoying spending time with you. Can you stay another hour, or would you like to walk around for a bit? Then I'll need to get back to studying." Be sure to let your friend know you had fun (if you did), and would like to hang out again (if you would).

Through "dating," people learn more about the qualities they value and/or find attractive, as well as those that they dislike and/or can't tolerate. Dating also is a way to build friendships. You can get to know different people, regardless of whether you decide to pursue a romantic relationship with them.

Best of luck!

Alice!

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