

how **NOT** to date a

LOSER

GEORGIA SHAFFER



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Let's Journey Together

Maybe you read the title and thought, *Been there, dated that.*
Perhaps you thought, *I never want that experience.*

Or maybe you're wondering, *How do I know if I'm dating a loser?*

I realize some of you may have reacted negatively to the term "loser" because, in God's eyes, everyone has value, worth, and purpose. In that sense no one is or ever could be a loser. However, for many reasons, some people are not healthy individuals where they currently are. Maybe in ten years they will be, but not now. And the key word is "maybe." So before I define what I mean by the word "loser," here's a quick checklist to help you identify whether your current relationship is healthy.

A Winner or a Loser?

Place a check mark next to the following statements that are true.

The person I'm dating generally...

_____ blames others (or me) rather than takes responsibility for bad choices and mistakes.

_____ prefers to stay the same rather than stretch, change, and grow.

_____ is stuck in self-pity and uses failure and loss as an excuse for lack of growth and maturity.

- _____ tends to act out his or her feelings whether others are hurt or not.
- _____ avoids pain at all costs.
- _____ holds on to past hurts and resentments and has problems “letting them go.”
- _____ tends to hide the truth or is afraid to be open and honest about his or her feelings and weaknesses.
- _____ focuses on self and ignores the feelings and wishes of others.
- _____ feels threatened by any interests and/or activities you have that don't include him or her.
- _____ perceives seeking the advice or help of others as a sign of weakness.

Scoring

1 to 3 check marks: You're probably dealing with the normal struggles of close relationships. We all have areas in which we can grow, and this book can help you do that.

4 to 5 check marks: You probably are involved in a moderately dysfunctional relationship. This book will help you identify and overcome obstacles so you can move toward the joy of an intimate, loving connection.

6 or more check marks: You're probably involved in a dysfunctional relationship or, put in another way, *You are probably dating a loser.* Start reading now! This book may help you avoid years of untold pain.

In the context of dating, I describe a loser as a “hurting person who hurts others because he or she lacks self-awareness and hasn't chosen to do the hard work needed to heal, change, and grow.” A more practical description is found by contrasting loser behavior with that of healthy people. What do I mean?

- Losers blame others. Healthy people take personal responsibility for their bad choices and admit their mistakes.
- Losers prefer to stay the same and don't see the need for change and growth. Healthy people want to learn and grow.
- Losers, like healthy people, have junk and sin in their lives, but losers make excuses for it. Healthy people work to overcome their problems and not be controlled by their pasts. They move beyond them.
- Losers stay stuck in self-pity. Healthy people bounce back from failure and loss, even when it's hard.
- Losers act out their feelings instead of talking or praying about them. Healthy people recognize and own their feelings.
- Losers avoid pain at all costs. Healthy people understand pain is part of living and growth.

In the first section of this book, we'll examine key areas that create obstacles in our relationships. We'll look at our dating histories, the fears that consume us, the blind spots we might have overlooked, the unhealthy patterns or lies we internalized from our past, and the losses that can keep us stuck. I'll share some of my own difficulties and those of other singles as you think about yours. By addressing these issues together, we can remove what hinders our

healing and growth. When it comes to dating, what we don't know *can* hurt us.

In the second half of the book, we'll focus on the attributes and habits we can put in place so we'll flourish in this single season of our lives. As you read about how other singles handled the challenges they experienced, please know many of the names and identifying details have been changed to protect identities. Occasionally I have compiled a single story from the accounts of individuals to highlight typical situations and positive solutions.

Each chapter ends with an opportunity to apply the information to your life and compile a "How Not to Date a Loser Relationship Profile." Many of these require thought, so give yourself the time you need for maximum benefit.

Once you complete your relationship profile, you'll have a record detailing your style of connecting to God, yourself, and others. Your profile will contain your list of deal makers, deal breakers, and intimacy blockers. Whenever you are in doubt about where you're going or how it's going, you can refer to your relationship profile and refresh your memory about who you are and how to make smart choices.

So grab paper and pen and let's get started on this adventure!



Part I

How Did Dating Get So Difficult?

What was I thinking?" I said and laughed as I reminisced with my friend about a loser I dated years ago. Long distance he looked even worse than he did then. I was married for 19 years, but in the ensuing 16 years of singleness, I've experienced and made choices that now have me wondering, *What was I thinking?*

And in my counseling and life coaching practice, I've encountered some incredible stories that made me wonder, *What were they thinking?*

While most of us can laugh at some of our dating sagas years later, at the time it's painful when relationships don't turn out the way we hoped. And some dating experiences are so horrible it's difficult to ever find humor in them.

I can't tell you the number of hours my single friends and I spend discussing dating. Sometimes we express our pain. Sometimes we retell someone else's dating disaster. Sometimes we share the joy of dating. While each dating relationship is unique, it's amazing how many of our comments, especially about other people, end up being similar. You've probably heard them too:

- He's so thoughtful.
- She has a great sense of humor.
- She believes everything he tells her.
- Why doesn't he listen to our advice?

- Why does she tolerate that abuse?
- She'll never change.

The reality is that dating can be difficult, and there's no shortage of people to avoid out there in the world. We often meet them without even trying. One friend said, "If a loser's out there, I'll find him."

As a licensed psychologist and a certified life coach, I've come to realize that it usually takes several failed relationships before we're willing to say "I need help." Many of us allow our dating lives to just happen—to evolve on its own. We fail to consider that developing certain skills and insights may help us get better results or protect us from poor choices.

We're intentional about spending our money. We're intentional about doing well on our jobs. We're intentional about our health. But dating? I believe one of the main reasons we aren't is that we don't plan on being single for a long period of time. We hope to quickly find that loving, long-term relationship, get married, and let our dating life fade into the distant past. Most of us don't want to be single, so why would we embrace what we don't want? And if we get good at being on our own, our season of singleness might last longer.

Another reason we may not want to spend time learning how to make smart dating choices is that it means we have to admit the truth. We're *still* single. We're one of *them*—you know, the ones married people say "have issues." But as my pastor admitted one Sunday from the pulpit, whether we're single or married, *we all have issues*. "And if you're wondering what yours are," he said, "get married and your spouse will be happy to enlighten you."

For years after my divorce I struggled with accepting my single status. The pain and turmoil caused by the separation and divorce resulted in some of the most difficult years of my life. I'll never forget my response the first time I was asked to speak at a singles conference. Although I spoke professionally on other topics, I said, "I don't speak to singles groups."

The meeting planner, who knew me fairly well, asked, “Well, would you at least be willing to consider it?”

I said yes, I’d think about it and quickly hung up the phone. Immediately I thought, *Well, Georgia, you are single. Why can’t you speak to singles?* I suddenly realized I didn’t want to speak to this audience because I would have to admit I was one of them.

I did change my mind, and that conference for singles became the first of many wonderful opportunities to reach out to men and women facing the challenges and choices of single life. Today I’m passionate about coaching people who want to address their real issues and establish healthy habits for love and life.

It doesn’t matter whether you’ve just begun to date or your dating life is an ugly wreck, there’s hope for you. You don’t have to be an accident waiting to happen. By putting yourself in the driver’s seat you can avoid crashing into losers. To maneuver safely through the hazards of dating, it’s important to acquire the following qualities, much like a driver becomes adept at scanning the road and using peripheral vision to know what’s nearby.

Be willing to learn. You don’t need a college degree to be successful at meeting nice men or women, but you may need to learn new things and shed self-defeating behaviors. Choose to learn from your mistakes instead of repeating them. Work on gaining tools and strategies that will help you make real changes in your dating life.

The first step is to work on making yourself better. I know, I know. It sounds simplistic, but the truth is that the healthier you are, the less likely you will be to settle for anything less than the best. If you’re reading this book, you’ve demonstrated you are willing to learn and grow. That’s a great start.

Liz, whom I met recently while speaking at a conference, is a brilliant surgeon. But when it comes to choosing men who will respect her, she admits, “I’m pretty dumb.” Many people discover that IQ and emotional intelligence (EI) are two different things. In

dating, EI is vital and, fortunately, can be learned. Daniel Goleman, in his landmark book *Emotional Intelligence*, states that EI is what enables us to be aware of our own emotions and gives us the ability to manage them. Emotional intelligence also enables us to recognize and handle the emotions of others. Improving your EI is one of many things you can do to improve your social life.

Be willing to stay connected. Caring, committed friendships, separate from any dating interests, are essential if we're going to make wise choices. Our relationships, beginning with our connection with God, provide the environment in which we can change and grow. Too often we ignore these close relationships to focus on that one special relationship—many times with disastrous results.

Back in my high school days there was a competitive spirit among some of my girlfriends as we vied for the attention of a few star athletes. What was lacking was a real sense of support for each other. As an adult I've experienced caring and cooperation, and I realize how vital this supportive mindset is to our ongoing growth and well-being.

"Authentic community," author and pastor Michael Cavanaugh said, "is people sharing their lives with each other. A sense of partnering with, a desire to be with, a personal interest in the well-being of the other person, a willingness to sacrifice for the good of the other person. It is what a healthy family would be like if family were available."¹

Since family isn't available to singles—at least in the sense of husband, wife, and children—we need to create a network of people who are concerned about us and whom we can love and support. With our cell phones, iPods, and computers, we're becoming more and more isolated and experiencing fewer face-to-face interactions that help us develop and maintain authentic community. We'll discuss this more later, but for now I encourage you to commit to cultivating a few close relationships. The best and

most supportive relationship to cultivate first is with Jesus—who loves you and me unconditionally and faithfully.

Be willing to accept help. Sometimes the very thing we say will never happen to us does. When Sara started to date Todd, she was aware of his history of jealousy and rage. “I can promise you—he’ll never treat me that way,” Sara said. As a capable, strong-willed woman, she had no problems stating what she wanted or needed. As her relationship with Todd developed, however, her self-confidence gradually diminished. When Todd accused her of staring at or flirting with other men, she questioned her motives. She thought she’d only glanced at men, but perhaps she had really looked too long. Todd undermined her relationships with her close female friends by finding fault with them. Over time she became isolated and Todd became the center of her world. She loved him, and he controlled her.

“I constantly walked on eggshells, doing anything and everything I could to make him happy—to keep him from getting angry with me,” Sara said. “But his jealous rages turned into threats, and then one day his threats became reality. I became a victim of physical abuse.”

If you are involved with someone who is physically or emotionally abusive or who is addicted to sex, drugs, or alcohol, please seek professional help now. Abuse and addiction are vicious cycles you can’t break alone. Ending a relationship with someone with these problems requires encouragement and support from people who care about you. We will discuss destructive relationships later, but for now let me clarify when life coaching is valuable and when professional counseling is preferred or necessary.

Life coaching, which is the purpose of this book, helps you gain the insights and skills needed to move forward and grow. Coaching often enables people to reach their goals sooner because they have someone guiding them and pointing out what obstacles may be keeping them stuck. It also helps them become more cognizant and

responsible for their own choices, actions, and feelings. In contrast, counseling focuses on healing from emotional pain and brokenness. Therapists might address issues from the past or a current crisis.

If you're involved in a destructive relationship or repeatedly trying to rescue and fix someone, be willing to reach out and get help. Sara did. She terminated her relationship with Todd, and she's slowly regaining her self-confidence and rebuilding her life.

Be willing to be yourself. This book isn't about how to fix or save losers. It's about you accepting yourself...and focusing on being the best you can be so you can avoid the pain and destructive behavior of unhealthy relationships. Too many of us pour vast amounts of time, energy, and money into trying to change or rehabilitate someone. Admittedly losers are usually people who have been deeply hurt or wounded and we want to help them, but, as the saying goes, "Hurting people hurt others."

To find someone who will help you be the best you can be as well as someone whom you encourage as he or she grows, you need to be real, to show your authentic self right from the start of your relationship. Recently on a flight home from Tennessee, a single man and I discussed the joys and challenges of dating. "The thing that drives me crazy," he said, "are women who are afraid to be themselves. They pretend to be someone they're not and invariably, after a couple of months, the truth comes out. Why can't they be honest right from the start?"

He's right that many of us try to please those in our lives and, as a result, we can morph into the person we think they want us to be. But as my seatmate said, sooner or later the truth of who we are is revealed. Pleasing people only produces problems, while being comfortable with who we are simplifies life. Plus it has the added benefit of making others comfortable when they're around us.

Be willing to commit to making one adjustment or change at a time. Many times when we commit to something new, we attempt to transform *everything* about ourselves overnight. Guaranteed failure! While everyone can use improvement in many areas, we need to be patient with the process. If we change too many things at once, we'll soon feel overwhelmed and hopeless and begin to believe the negative voice that tells us to give up because nothing will ever really change.

As you read the various suggestions and strategies throughout this book, focus on making one small adjustment at a time. Write the key concept down and put it somewhere you'll see often as a reminder until it becomes part of you. Once you experience success, make the next small adjustment. Slowly, over time, you'll see real change. I recommend keeping a journal or record of your progress. For me, it is often difficult to discern growth unless I can look back at what I wrote or thought months earlier.

Yes, you will make mistakes and experience setbacks, but as long as you are focused on making small changes, ultimately you will see a dramatic difference. Be patient! One day you'll look back with satisfaction at how far you've come.

Be willing to take a dating inventory. What is your dating history? Are you dating at all? If you have dated, think back on your past dating relationships. Go through your old diaries, address books, Palm Pilot, Rolodex, or Blackberry, and list all the people you've gone out with more than three times. On your computer or on a piece of a lined paper draw four columns and label them with the following headers: name, attractive qualities, areas of concern noticed in the beginning [but discounted or ignored], and negative qualities that showed up over time.

Name	Attractive qualities	Areas of concern noticed in the beginning	Negative qualities that showed up over time

Complete each column of the chart by listing several traits. After you've completed your chart, highlight, circle, or underline descriptors listed more than once in each column. For example, are you attracted to someone with money or a prestigious position? Maybe you like business professionals who wear suits to work? Or people who are needy and want to be rescued.

Pay special attention to the list of negatives. You could get creative and use different colored highlighters to mark any repeated negative traits. While the positives show what you *think* you were

looking for, the negatives speak louder. They say, "This is what I find. This is what I keep ending up with."

I've provided a few samples to give you an idea of how to be specific when completing your chart. (The names have been changed to protect the innocent...and the not-so-innocent.) The first one shows someone who was attracted to good-looking, kind, protective men, but she ended up with those who had anger issues.

Name	Attractive qualities	Areas of concern noticed in the beginning	Negative qualities that showed up over time
Matt	Kind and caring. Very protective of me.	Didn't even want me to go for a walk by myself in case someone would hurt me.	Extreme jealousy. Possessive. Violent temper.
Jon	Well-mannered, beautiful blue eyes and exercised regularly.	Critical of waiters and those in service positions.	Critical and demeaning of me. Mood swings that included rage.
Shawn	Polite. Great body. Generous.	Demanding of those who worked under him.	Sarcastic. Wouldn't talk to me for a week if I made him angry.
Luke	Gorgeous. Loved sports.	Opinionated and inflexible.	Rageaholic. Rude and crude. Free time dictated by sporting events. Never showed affection.

In the next example, this man was enticed by intelligence, competence, and great looks. However, he attracted controlling, driven women.

Name	Attractive qualities	Areas of concern noticed in the beginning	Negative qualities that showed up over time
Brittney	Brilliant, with several advanced degrees. Extremely competent at work. Knock-out.	Obsessed with work and current projects.	Workaholic. Perfectionist. Detached emotionally. How people perceived her was of extreme importance.
Michelle	Nationally recognized doctor. Stimulating conversations. Cute and wealthy.	Self-focused and manipulative.	Tense. Seldom relaxed or had fun. Critical and second-guessed everything I did. Focused on the image of being a successful doctor.
Emma	Beautiful. Responsible. Ambitious.	My feelings or opinions didn't count.	Control freak—her way or the highway.

By taking the time to consider your dating history, you may see for the first time the similarities in your previous relationships. Creating an awareness of the kind of people you're finding and dating is not to condemn yourself. Often after singles complete their charts, I hear, "How could I be so stupid?" or "I'm so dumb." Instead of beating yourself up, affirm that you are doing what is needed to correct the problem.

Dr. Phil suggests that by doing a "relationship autopsy" and dissecting your relationship patterns, you'll get better at relationships, because you have the courage to be honest with yourself.²

Here's another exercise that may help you face the reality of the kind of people you are attracting. It might even help you to laugh at

the choices you have made. Barbara DeAngelis, author of *Are You the One for Me?* suggests taking the negative traits of those you've dated and writing an "emotional want ad."³ Here are two ad samples.

Wanted

Man who hasn't cut the apron strings with his mother. Especially looking for someone who hasn't grown up and thinks the whole world revolves around him. If you're the kind of person who thinks the rules don't apply to you, give me a call.

Wanted

Gorgeous woman who needs someone to boss around. A lack of empathy is a real plus. If you love to use people and get irritated whenever things don't go your way, we need to meet.

One creative woman thought it would be great fun to have a small group of her close friends complete their charts and write their emotional want ads. She had a dinner party and asked each woman to bring a printed copy of her ad. She threw all the slips of paper into a basket and after dinner they read them. The goal was to see if anyone could identify the person who wrote the ad. They laughed and had a fun time. The game also confirmed to themselves, as well as to their close friends, the choices they'd made in the past and their willingness to now approach dating differently.

Each woman gave her friends permission to be truthful about men they saw her dating and point out if any of the men she spent time with "answered" the emotional want ad. Habits are hard to break, but having the acceptance and support of friends makes recognizing ingrained behaviors and changing them so much easier.

Not all singles have a dating history. Some have dated very little because they're waiting for that person who doesn't even know they're alive to suddenly see them, or they are shy, or they just haven't wanted to take the risk. LaTonya was infatuated with the top point

“It was thought-provoking for me—especially the exercises on blind spots and intimacy blockers. They helped me understand how I relate to others.”

My Deal-Breakers

I will not continue to date someone who...

- is critical of me and demeaning of waiters, flight attendants, and anyone in a serving profession.
 - is prone to extreme mood swings and rage.
 - is controlling and manipulative.
 - is self-absorbed, immature, and irresponsible.
 - worships money, prestige, or anyone or anything other than God.
-

My Deal-Breakers

I will not continue to date someone who...

- _____

- _____

LOSER

- _____

- _____

- _____
