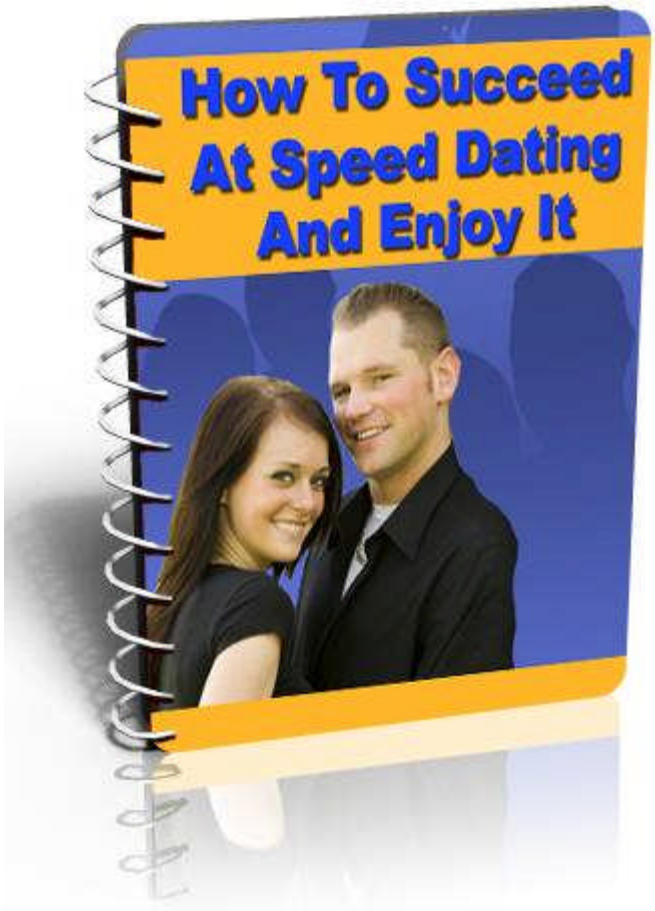

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HOW TO SUCCEED AT SPEED DATING AND ENJOY IT

Speed dating has taken the singles world by storm and not for lack of successes. This is how people like you, single and tired of the bar scene and not doing well with online dating, find real people to share your life with.

As you get older, your opportunities for finding a good partner diminish. In college, you had a large number of members of the opposite sex living right by you. You went to class with them, ate with them, and socialized with them. The college even had an entire division to help you meet people of the opposite sex although they disguised its true purpose by calling it the "Student Life Division."

After graduation, your dating options became more limited. But, 20 somethings tend to hang out at clubs and bars, so you were probably still able to meet a wide variety of singles who were interested in dating.

As you reached your 30th birthday, though, hanging out in bars trying to pick up men or women became less attractive. Your career was probably taking up more of your time. Also, the people at the bars looked messed up or picked over.

At this point, you may have turned to personals or online dating sites. The problem with this approach is that you spend a significant amount of time developing a "relationship" with someone by email or phone just to realize that there is no chemistry when you meet in person. Also, it is a well known fact that people hide behind a wealth of lies when they write personal ads or develop online profiles. It is even not unheard of for people to say they are of the opposite gender. And, people routinely shave years and pounds off of their true numbers.

In this environment, a new way of meeting people to date has sprung up. It's called Speed Dating. Speed Dating developed in the Jewish community in the 1990s, but now there are events for all types of people. You may have first encountered Speed Dating in movies like Hitch or the 40 Year Old Virgin, but it is definitely a part of the singles scene today.

The basic set up of a Speed Dating event is that anywhere from 6 to 40 people of each sex are in a room together. Each woman sits at a table and the men rotate through the tables in a specified order. Everyone has a number. You spend a short period of time with each person of the opposite sex – generally about 6 minutes – and at the end of that person, the host blows a whistle and the man moves on to the next woman while the woman welcomes a new man.

The main benefit of Speed Dating is that you can tell whether there is chemistry right away. Part of any romantic relationship is the physical attraction that people have for each other. If this is missing, there is no future. While you won't get a person's life story in 6 minutes, you will be able to tell whether there is any attraction.

There is also a level of honesty that happens when people are face to face. It is easy to lie about your weight or your age when no one is looking. In person, the facts speak for themselves.

Finally, there is a sense that if you don't click, you've only wasted a few minutes of your life. Going out on first dates, even if you keep them short, requires the effort of getting ready, going to the coffee house, restaurant, or bar, and spending the time with the person. Getting out of an uncomfortable situation is awkward.

With Speed Dating, if a situation is awkward, you're only in it for a few minutes and you have every hope that the next encounter will be better. You haven't wasted an evening just because a single "mini-date" didn't work out.

If you do like someone and want to get to know them better, you simply mark their number on your card that you turn in at the end of the evening. (Some Speed Dating services have gone to posting web pages with the pictures of the attendees and you mark which people you would like to see again over the internet.)

Of course, this works both ways. The person you'd like to meet has to mark your number as well. If both of you have indicated that you want to see each other again, you will get the other person's contact information. This is generally only their email, but some companies give out more information.

It's then up to the two of you to take your relationship further. One of you has to contact the other one and set up a real date. The nice thing is that you already have an indication that the other person is at least interested in seeing you again which removes some of the follow up stress.

Parameters of Speed Dating

Your Speed Dating experience is highly dependant on the company sponsoring the event. For instance, some events feature 6 or fewer couples while others have as many as 40 people of each gender. Further, some companies work hard to balance genders, closing sign ups for one gender when a cap is reached, while others allow the maximum number of people to sign up even if there is not gender parity.

For companies where gender parity is a prime concern, they put a cap on the number for each gender and then open a waiting list. As people on the main list back out, they send out notices to people on the waiting list inquiring whether they would like to sign up. Unfortunately, there are factors beyond the control of the event management company, and many times there is not gender parity. In these cases, members of one gender will have a "bye" on some rounds.

The amount of time you will spend on each "date" is tied in with the number of people attending. When there are 40 "dates," you are looking at a 3 hour event and you'll spend about 3 minutes with each person. Smaller events let you spend as long as 8 minutes with the person.

Some have suggested that the ideal Speed Dating event has 10 to 15 members of each sex who can talk to each other for 6 minutes. This puts the entire event at an hour and a half to two hours which is a reasonable amount of time for a person to put forth their best features.

Speed Dating events generally cost between $25 and $50 per person. They tend to be held in popular restaurants and bars. Drinks are an additional fee. You will be required to pay up front which encourages you to actually show up. You're less likely to develop cold feet if you have already shelled out the money. This is important for maintaining gender parity as described above.

Some Speed Dating events are restricted to specific categories of people. Jewish Speed Dating, where the event arose, is still popular in communities with large Jewish populations. Some events are limited to people in specific age brackets. Others request that you be a

"professional" although that term is defined quite broadly. There are even Speed Dating events for Gays, Lesbians, and Trans Gendered people.

What to Look For When Signing Up for a Speed Dating Event

There are numerous Speed Dating services now available. Some are part of larger companies offering an array of dating and matchmaking services. Others target the Speed Dating market exclusively. There are also commercial establishments unrelated to the dating market that try to get into the act by offering Speed Dating events. These can either be restaurants and bars themselves or in conjunction with a charity.

Whoever sponsors the event, you want to be able to ask some questions. One of the things that is important to know is whether the sponsors have a track record of actually holding their events. Too many times, the sponsors advertise the event only to find that they have 3 men and 40 women signed up (or the opposite.) Knowing that this is an untenable position to be in, they cancel the whole event.

One of the most important questions is what kind of people they anticipate attending. If you are a 35 year old man and most of the ladies are going to be in their 50s, it might not be such a great investment for you (unless you're looking for a Cougar). Also, you may care whether it is limited to people of a specific religion or socio-economic demographic.

You also want to know what efforts have been placed into balancing genders. While having a couple rounds where you're sitting alone won't ruin the evening, if there is a significant male to female imbalance, it could throw off your rhythm. If they have a main list and a wait list, it is a good sign that they make an effort to balance genders.

If the event planning company is established, look to see whether they have had any success stories. Generally, a company should be able to tell you that people have gotten together and even wed after being at their events. If they can't produce success stories, it may be indicative that they bring too many different types of people together and matches just aren't made.

Find out if the same people show up at event after event. There should be a good turnover of people as they make matches and "drop out" of the Speed Dating scene for a time. But, when people try

several rounds of Speed Dating, they expect to see a majority of new faces each time.

Finally, find out whether there is a guarantee. Lack of a guarantee should not make you avoid the Speed Dating event by any means, but a guarantee shows you that most people make at least one match. The guarantee states that if you make no matches you will either get your money back or be allowed to attend a second Speed Dating event at no charge.

What to Wear

One company calls Speed Dating a "Pre-Date," and while you are spending only a limited amount of time with each man or woman, you should still dress to impress.

Many Speed Dating functions are held right after work and business dress is common. At events held later in the evening, the dress is more casual, but still dressy. Wear clothes that are appropriate for a first date at the venue where you are heading. Most Speed Dating events are held at upscale restaurants and bars.

Remember that you are going to be judged against many other people. Therefore, you want to dress to your best advantage. Women tend to do best attracting men when they wear red clothing. For men, navy blue sends the message that they are a stable provider. One expert recommends that both men and women who are looking to attract a partner avoid wearing yellows and pale greens as it makes them look wishy washy.

You might want to wear something that makes you memorable. If your pool of dates are going to see a dozen or more other people, you want to be remembered. While going over the top is definitely not recommended, wearing something that makes people smile can be a good thing. For men, wearing a funny tie with an otherwise conservative suit can send just the right message. Women can wear a particularly interesting piece of jewelry that can be a conversation piece.

Care should be taken with basic grooming. This is, in fact, a first date, albeit with multiple people. As the old adage goes, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression." Further, the impression your "dates" will get of you is limited to a few minutes. So, sloppy grooming could kill what could otherwise be a good connection.

You may also want to use scent to your advantage. While you don't want to overpower the person with cologne or perfume, it is possible to make an impression with the kind you use. Just don't overdo it.

What to Expect

First off, check your calendar to make sure that you have the right date and time. Speed Dating is not something you can reschedule. So, don't miss the event!

Next up, know that there is going to be a period where you can mingle before the main event. Usually there will be a bar. Most of the time, the pre show at a Speed Dating event is a lot like a Junior High dance with the women getting together in one corner and the guys in another. Bold souls that mingle with the opposite sex have an advantage when it comes to the "date" as some of the initial awkwardness has already been eliminated.

If you are a man and you buy a drink, be aware that if you take it to the first table, you will probably end up carrying it around all evening. There is not any time between "dates" to set it down and it is rude to leave it on a woman's table. The woman won't like it because it makes her look to future dates like she's had more drinks than she has actually consumed.

You should also visit the restroom before the Speed Dating main event begins. There's no time for a bathroom break and if you had a few drinks during the pre-show, you may be hopping toward the end.

The host for the evening will call the event to order and lay out the ground rules. Sometimes specific questions, particularly ones related to employment or addresses are off limits. You will also be told not to exchange contact information. You will be given a card with numbers for all of the people of the opposite sex. The women will be instructed to select a table and the men will be given information about how they are to rotate through the room.

Then the Speed Dating will begin. You will proceed to the tables and have your first "date." Know that the first date may be awkward, but you will get better! The major benefit of Speed Dating is that if you mess up one date, you haven't lost an entire evening.

You might consider making some notes on your card. Even simply writing the man or woman's name down by the number will help you remember who it was that you saw.

During the entire event, you should be smiling. Relax, this is supposed to be fun. If you don't find your soul mate this evening, it's not the end of the world.

When you are with a specific man or woman, give them your entire attention. Don't look around the room at the other opportunities. You will get the chance to meet everyone. Your current "date" deserves your undivided attention.

At the end of the allotted time, the host will blow a whistle. This is the men's signal to get up and move to the next table.

When you meet your next date, it is a good idea to have a good way to greet them. A strong hand shake is essential. You may also want to have an opening line that starts the session off right. Humor always helps.

If you happen to have a "bye" from time to time because there is a gender mismatch, it is acceptable to casually look around the room to see how the other couples are interacting. This may give you signals as to how the people you are interested in interact with other dates. Having a bye isn't such a bad thing either because it allows you to rest between dates.

At the end of the evening, you will be asked to fill out your cards indicating which people you would be interested in meeting for a longer date. Be generous on this list. Remember, it is unlikely that you will meet these people on your own again. The only way you will have a chance at getting their contact information is if you specify that you are open to a future date.

In a few days, the event company will email you with the names and email addresses of the people with whom you made a match. You can then decide whether to contact them. They also have your email address and can contact you.

Keep in mind that a Speed Dating experience is not a real first date. So, exercise the same kinds of caution on a first date with a Speed Dating contact that you would with any other kind of blind date. For instance, come in separate vehicles and meet at a public place. Plan your first real date to be something like coffee or lunch where you don't have to invest a lot of time if things don't work out.

If you are unlucky and you don't have any matches on the first Speed Dating experience, don't give up the genre. You didn't stop going to bars just because you didn't pick up a date every time, did you? Speed Dating may take you a couple of trys to get used to. Once you develop the rhythm of these microdates, you could become more successful at them.

Your Six to Eight Minutes of Fame

At the heart of the Speed Dating experience is the short period of time you have to talk to each of your dates. You want to make the most of it. You do this by having good questions ready to ask and by being able to answer the questions you are asked well.

What kind of questions should you ask on your Speed Dates? What you are trying to establish is whether there is any point of going out on a first date. You are not trying to figure out whether you want to marry the person.

You might want to ask any questions that would exclude someone from your dating pool. For instance, if you never date anyone who smokes, you might want to clear the deck on that one. If you personally use recreational drugs and want to make sure any potential date is comfortable with that, you might pose questions that would assure you that everything 420 was okay.

You want your questions to be fun and unusual as well. Remember, your questions say as much about you as your answers do. Don't ask off the wall hypotheticals ("If you were an axe murderer, where would you hide the bodies?") that make you look weird.

Questions like "what do you do for fun?" allow you to see whether you have any common interests. Asking specific questions like "what is your favorite movie" actually give you more insight into a person than more general ones like "what kinds of movies do you like?" Most people like to talk about food – whether it is cooking or eating out. So, finding out what kind of food a person likes gives you a basis for future conversation (and for possible future date ideas).

There are bad questions as well. For instance, whether someone has ever committed a crime is something that you may want to know, it is unlikely that you will get a true answer if the person has spent time in jail. Therefore, you have just wasted valuable time.

Other questions are just not appropriate for a microdate. Whether someone eventually wants kids is something you talk about on a real date. You're just seeing if there is chemistry.

You want to ask open ended questions rather than the type that require yes or no responses, but you can take it too far given the limited scope of Speed Dating. For instance, asking someone what they would do with a million dollars just won't give you the kind of information that you need to see whether to proceed to the first date step.

Also be careful with questions related to people's work. Most people hate what they do and having to talk about it puts a negative spin on the microdate. Men are especially hesitant to give out too much information about their jobs lest they be seen as a meal ticket.

You should also be prepared to give answers to commonly asked questions. If you can have humorous – but not totally canned – responses prepared for the kinds of questions you are likely to be asked, you will have more success in Speed Dating. For instance, one question that gets asked a lot is "how did your last relationship end?" If you can pull it off, a funny response is "with a restraining order!" followed, of course, with a very brief explanation of how it ended and the fact that you are still friends.

The questions and answers in a Speed Date are a give and take. You should not expect to dominate as either the questioner or answerer, but share time. Have some essential questions ready and expect to answer an equal number. If your Speed Dating partner that round doesn't have questions ready, be prepared to ask some additional but less important questions.

Online Speed Dating

Of course, if something works offline, someone is ready to move it to the world wide web. Online Speed Dating sites have popped up. Be aware, though, that the success of traditional Speed Dating is that you actually get to meet the individuals. You can see whether there is any chemistry between you.

Conclusion

Speed Dating is an excellent way for men and women to meet each other. It is especially popular for people in their 30s and older who have not yet made a love connection but are too old for the more traditional singles scene. If you make a match during a Speed Dating session, you are welcome to follow it up. Be aware that Speed Dating does not take the place of a first date. It is merely a way to meet people with whom you'd like to have a first date.

Speed Dating has developed in the last 20 years because it is successful at what it does – allow men and women to meet in the real world and decide whether to pursue a relationship further.

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