

LIFE AS A professional matchmaker

KAREN MOONEY HAS BEEN IN THE FASCINATING BUSINESS OF FINDING LOVE FOR OTHER PEOPLE FOR MORE THAN 30 YEARS. LOUISE RAMSAY HEARS HER STORY.





Ever thought you could be a real life cupid? Maybe Valentine's is one of your favourite days to celebrate, with flowers and cards declaring your innermost feelings. Or if single, perhaps looking at the world through rose-tinted glasses has you heart-eyed for romance. The art to finding love for others isn't as easy as shooting an arrow — but it isn't impossible. For Karen Mooney,



founder and MD of Sara Eden Introductions, it turned out to be her calling.

Karen explains, "I started professional matchmaking 33 years ago this September. I've always been entrepreneurial. I broke my shoulder in 1988, and my friends came to visit. When they were coming to see me, they were complaining how they couldn't meet the right sort of people to date. It seemed so impossible.

"I just had a moment — suddenly I thought, there must be a gap in the market. A gap for

single young professionals, as I was in my 20s at the time. And I knew if I didn't do something now, someone else would. So I handed in my notice at work. I knew nothing about the dating industry, except I had the most fantastic gut feeling.

"I was good with people and I have a business background, so why not? I started from my kitchen table and then quickly moved to offices in Windsor. We opened our London office ten years later. I'm so happy I made that leap into a new business because I love it. You never know who is going to come through the door. I once interviewed a sea captain, which is someone you don't meet every day!"

Before delving into the world of matchmaking, Karen worked at Buckingham Palace, and her links to the palace and Windsor Castle remain. Her office sits opposite the castle, while the London office is a two minute walk from the palace. She has previously worked in PR for the Prince Philip Trust Fund, but it's matchmaking that has been her one true love.

But that doesn't mean every match is a winner. As Karen says, "You can't help everyone unfortunately. Some people don't have »

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Dating dos and don'ts


■ **DO:** Be open and honest — communication is the backbone to any relationship. Be clear about your wants and needs, what type of relationship you want and your plans for the future. If you're looking to be "exclusive", let your date know to avoid any relationship 'games'.

■ **DON'T:** Share anything sensitive with someone you've just met online. Sharing bank details, credit card pictures or your signature is a bad idea. And remember, you're not a bank, so if your beau asks for money to bail them out, refuse. Their response could be telling.

■ **DO:** Have an open mind, as you're more likely to have fun. While every match or meet may not be long-term love, it can be a story or future friend. While their shoes may not be your taste, their humour may be. So give it a go!

■ **DON'T:** Compare yourself to others — be it how other generations date or how loved-up your social circle is. It's all about going at your own pace and doing what's best for you.

■ **DO:** Ask questions, as it shows that you're interested in your date. While we're not saying pull out a pad like you're in an interview, asking gentle questions will have the ice thawing at the start of the date soon enough.



“WE KEEP IN TOUCH WITH OUR CLIENTS AFTER THEY FIND THEIR HAPPILY EVER AFTER.”

realistic expectations. You can't meet Prince Charming on the first try! But it's lovely to see people, who have perhaps been alone for a long time, come in to us and then they meet someone and sail off into the sunset.”

Sara Eden Introductions take love seriously. There is no artificial intelligence creating an algorithm for clients. Instead, they do things the old fashioned way, with an interview — and three forms of ID.

“The reason we don't use things like computers is because not only is it a more personal touch, but it's tried and tested. We know it works, so why change?” Karen asks. “The people who are coming to us are professional people — doctors, lawyers, entrepreneurs, airline pilots and even a sea captain or two! They're people who want to meet people and date properly. They're just looking for a helping hand.

“They're interviewed and vetted by us and must show us three forms of ID. If we have any doubts about someone, we don't accept them into the service. For a lot of people, who perhaps have had a bad experience online, confidentiality is important. We have some well-known personalities on our books too. The sort of people we attract wouldn't want to use the internet or swipe left or right on an app. They're looking for a more personal experience.”

Karen continues, “These measures give clients the confidence to meet people with the service. It's important to remember that finding a partner isn't black and white. By coming to us, they're sitting down and sharing what sort of partner they're looking for. We have years of experience and can help — we really want to help them. It's like chatting to a friend and we keep in touch with our clients after they find their happily ever after.”

With Sara Eden, there are different levels of membership. Karen works with a small group of clients at the Founder level of membership, where she enjoys an amazing 95% success rate. But to find out more, you have to get in touch with Sara Eden. It's all very secretive and hush hush, which adds to the romance and mystery of it all.

With the pandemic, we spent more time continuously indoors that we had before. Leading British law firm Stewarts logged a 122% increase

in enquiries for divorce between July and October, compared to the previous year. And Citizens Advice reported a spike in searches around ending relationships. It seems that the pressure and stress of the pandemic has caused issues with relationships.

“Lockdown made us think an awful lot more. People can treat life like being a hamster on a wheel,” Karen explains. “You go about your life, almost on autopilot and go to work. You do your daily chores, look or check in with your children, whatever you're doing. And then suddenly you're at home all the time.

“It's been jarring for so many people — not just because there's a change, but because for the first time in a long time, they're *really* looking at their life.

“People have been thinking of what they want in life and perhaps what type of person they want to spend their life with. For some, they have maybe been alone for a while and now are looking for a partner. For others, it may be a case of recognising your current partner isn't meeting your needs.

“It's one of the things quite a lot of people forget when it comes to dating when they're younger, or maybe they get married younger and feel the need to have someone ‘complete’ them. Later in life, those same people may go through a divorce and it's like, ‘Okay, what do I actually want?’ The children have left the home and they suddenly feel alone in their relationship.

“To look deeply into yourself, being gentle yet critical, is difficult. You shouldn't stay together with someone to simply stay together. During lockdown, our business has rocketed by 60% despite the business having to go virtual due to lockdown measures.

“It seems even with such a difficult year, there's still room for love. And isn't that lovely?”





Pim and Lim on the happiest of days. Now the proud pair are grandparents.

Double generation match

“When Pim was divorced, he sought my help at Sara Eden, 27 years ago,” Karen says. “It was there he met his future wife Lim, who got married in 1992. Each year, Sara Eden hosts an anniversary party, where we invite a few couples from each year.

“Pim was chatting to my manager Debbie, who’s been here for 29 years. He said, ‘You know, my son Mark is a pilot and travels all over the world. He can’t find the time to settle down, but he wants a family’.

“Debbie encouraged him

to bring his son to the party and sure enough, he did. He met a few people and then we had a lady who had been a member for a year, who just hadn’t met The One. She rejoined and we introduced them. They fell in love and had a beautiful baby girl and are waiting for measures to ease before getting married.”

Claire, Mark’s fiancée, said, “Mark and I first met for drinks at a bar in Wimbledon and started dating. We went holidaying on the sunny Greek island of Paxos, going to a beautiful restaurant with a fabulous sunset view. It was here Mark proposed to me. Our wedding was booked for May 2020, but due to the pandemic, has been rebooked for November 2021.”

Mark and Claire gorgeous baby girl Sophia was born last November. This is Sara Eden’s first double generation success story. >>

FINDING ‘THE ONE’



OUR TIME

Specifically catering to singles over 50, this dating site and app aims to spark meaningful conversations and long term connections. Profiles are free to create and there’s even options for in-site video conversations, if you prefer face-to-face conversations over messaging.

ELITESINGLES

Are you a working professional looking for love? Then EliteSingles could be for you. It uses a personality assessment, based on the Five Factor Theory, to help find matches. A twist to typical dating services, as instead of swiping for matches, the site delivers three to seven matches to you per day. Once matched, you can browse profiles with an easy-to-use format. Membership starts from £49.95 per month.

SILVERSINGLES

This online dating site is specifically designed for 50+ people. Each member completes a questionnaire and the team manually verify new profiles — meaning there’s less room for fake profiles! Premium membership prices start at three months for £44.95.