True Love

Joe Burke lives with HIV, hepatitis C and hemophilia. In a POZ blog post, he offers five rules for finding that special someone, based on his personal experience. Just in time for Valentine's Day, below is an edited excerpt of his post.

December 21, 2015 By Joseph Burke

People simply want to be loved. Being alone and living with chronic illness is enough to make some not even enter the dating game, or keep them from discovering the great "what ifs" of life. Finding a partner educated enough to understand your disease, rather than run from it, can be difficult. HIV is a big deal, and it affects everyone and everything around you—family, friends and dating.

This list may not translate to everyone, but it contains enough of a map to point you in the right direction for true love. Often the biggest hurdle we have to face isn't dating itself, but our own reflection. Once we conquer the skewed image we have of ourselves, and truly realize our worth, we can become empowered to find true love and change the lives of everyone around us.

1. Circle of Trust. Friends are a precious commodity. It's vital that we surround ourselves with friends who are educated and who will be there to love, comfort and listen to you when you need it most. A great group of friends not only provides a solid foundation, but also helps us launch into new and otherwise uncharted areas. They encourage us, motivate us and make us feel wanted; that's important for self-esteem. Friends also help us stay accountable, socially aware and constantly engaged in conversations and real-life situations. Remove toxic friends, and find ones who elevate your spirits to new horizons.

2. Don't Believe the Naysayers. Something I always encourage people to take to heart in is, "You are not your disease!" Many of us have been told lie after lie: that we're not good enough, it's pointless, we're just going to get our hearts shattered. Don't be bound by a mere label; rather, have an impact on someone's life. Stop listening to the grumpy people who try to dictate what they think is best for you, and start empowering yourself to take chances. If you're true to yourself, people will naturally gravitate toward you, and the naysayers will fade away like yesterday's celebrity gossip column.

3. Stop, Breathe, Focus. If we concentrate all our efforts on finding true love while avoiding our surroundings, we will gradually lose perspective. Don't focus all your attention on finding your significant other; instead, work on being the best you that you can be, every moment, every day.

Remember, you're one thought away from contentment. Grumbling is actually more toxic and contagious than any other action we can do. Instead, be content, in the moment, and thankful for where you are and what you have, not what you don't. So stop, get your bearings, take a deep breath and refocus your goals.

4. Simply the Best. If you're single and reading this, let's face one fact: You just have you. Work on making an impact, and others will take notice of your efforts. True love isn't found in a dating app; it's discovered when volunteering for a local charity organization helping others. When you're truly happy and content with your life and where you are, it's typically in those moments others take notice and are attracted to your self-esteem and independence. I've never met a single human being who strays from a confident person. Have you? Sure, some days are better than others, I understand that sincerely, but approach each day as a new opportunity, rather than a burden.

5. Honesty Is the Best Policy. When I first found my true love and married her the following year, I reflected on the fact that I was open and honest with my partner. I told her my diagnoses and some of the daily challenges I face. A true partner will not flee, but rather gravitate toward honesty and humility. I prayed for over 10 years for a perfect companion to come my way, but I first had to work on me, and get over the "implanted thought" of being a sick person with complications. It's not complicated. It's life.

Go to blogs.poz.com/joeburke to read more of Joe's posts.

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