



Long-shot dating made doable  
By Matt Schneiderman



"Wow—that person could do so much better!" We've all heard that kind of comment before — maybe even muttered it ourselves — about a couple fit for *Beauty and the Geek* with no cameras to be seen. But, odds are, there's no real mystery about the pairing; the two just clicked, perhaps at a bar, perhaps online. You may not have model-caliber looks, but you definitely have some winning combination of humor, kindness, success, and intelligence. By learning to highlight those qualities, you can have a potential partner swooning. So before you discount the beauty before you, use these tips to place yourself squarely in the hotties' league.

#### Tease your way to conversation

Top experts recommend some counterintuitive tactics for online flirtation to bolster your confidence—and intrigue your intended. April Masini, author of *Think and Date Like a Man* and *Date Out of Your League* suggests sending a short note with an out-there, curiosity-provoking subject line, such as "Thanks for the message." Neil Strauss, author of *The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists*, favors an irresistible challenge that shows your confidence like: "Tell me about something funny that happened to you recently. If it makes me laugh, I'll send you two photos. You won't be disappointed." Or send a link to a website that generates your, say, rock star name or Hobbit name, and sign it with yours so he or she feels compelled to share the one found when he or she clicks. All of these are effective email ideas that get a person to hit "reply" and start typing—often before he or she has even checked out your profile.

#### Chat with panache

Stand out from the pack online by not stating the obvious ("I liked your profile." "I think you're cute." "We both like pizza!") in your correspondence. Instead, find obscure things that truly interest you — foreign travel or a favorite book — and mention that. Consider this case history: "I knew the woman I wanted to meet was a model—she said as much in her profile," says Alex Garth of New York City, a self-described "6" on the looks scale. "She also mentioned that she'd traveled to China, which we had in common, so I sent her an email asking her what she thought of Shanghai. Within a couple of weeks, we were dating." Use the same principle when you're making getting-to-know-you conversation in person with that new someone you want to impress. Focusing on something minor that he or she doesn't usually talk about sets you apart from the rest of the dating world by demonstrating your depth.

#### Pave the way for a first date

Once you've exchanged a couple of messages, swap phone numbers for the all-important call by saying, "I get busy, so let's continue this over the phone." The 15-minute conversation should prove to him or her that you're worth the effort and allow you to offer your time for a first meeting. One key to charming someone very desirable and in-demand? Don't appear overeager. "Mention that you're busy Wednesday and Friday, say, but can meet for one hour on Thursday," says Strauss. Being a busy and fulfilled individual is more attractive to most singles than someone with outward looks, and this kind of approach emphasizes those—whether or not they're 100% true.

#### Empower yourself in person

Whether you're approaching a stranger at a bar or meeting up with the person you found online, continue to show confidence, even if you have to fake it at first (eventually, you'll realize you deserve to have it and actually become suave—we promise). Masini recommends walking straight up to the man or woman you're eyeing and introducing yourself. "Don't be a shark and waste your night circling," says Masini. "That invests your time in someone you don't know," which will only make you feel more self-conscious about not being "good enough" for the person. To psych yourself up, tell yourself that you're the one who deserves to be convinced he or she's worth your time, not the other way around. After all, looks are only part of the package, right? Once you've started talking, set yourself apart from everyone else who gushes over this person's looks. Focus on aspects of his or her personality that other folks may overlook: "You have the best laugh!" "I love that you're a good tipper—it says a lot about how you treat people." Unusual compliments highlight your intuitive nature, and the person you're talking to is more likely to perceive a genuine connection between you two than if you offer canned praise.

#### Look good, even if you're not great-looking

So what if you're not drop-dead gorgeous yourself? Strauss says he lacks obvious physical charms, but that his confidence and charisma more than compensate. "Girls would meet me and be initially disappointed, but I would still win them over," says Strauss. "You don't have to be good-looking—you just have to *act* good-looking." Accomplish this by wearing flattering clothing (ask a straight-shooting salesperson to put you in a casual date outfit if you're not sure what looks best on you), walking tall, smiling at strangers, holding eye contact, and otherwise acting like you own the room. So raise your standards, hone your inner charm, and go for the cutie already!

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