

EVANSTON REVIEW

Love Essentially: Relationship coach says finding the one starts with you

By **Jackie Pilossoph**

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I can't even count the number of single people who have said things to me like, "It's so hard to meet someone," "There are no good guys out there" or "I'm going to be alone forever." It kind of makes finding Mr. or Ms. Right seem pretty hopeless, doesn't it?

So when a friend of mine told me she was seeing a "relationship coach," I was intrigued. I had plenty of questions for my friend. What does a relationship coach do? Help you set up your Match.com profile? Talk about where to meet single people? Tell you what to wear on a first date?

My friend's answer: none of the above. Her Chicago-based relationship coach, Sue DeSanto, LCSW, offers a 3-month or a 6-month program that helps single, divorced or widowed men and women embrace their gifts and talents, and feel confident in sharing these with the world. In other words, according to DeSanto, being truly fulfilled in a romantic relationship starts with the person seeking rather than the person being sought.

I sat down with DeSanto to learn in more detail how she helps facilitate relationship opportunities. The first thing I found out is that nine years ago, she herself went through the program she now shares with her clients.

"I got divorced 14 years ago with two small children at the time, and found the dating world daunting and scary. I didn't know how to do it," said DeSanto, who holds a master's degree in social work, and who has been a practicing psychotherapist for 20 years.

DeSanto attended the California-based Relationship Coaching Institute founded by relationship guru David Steele. Crediting the program for her success in finding true love and getting remarried a few years later, DeSanto decided she wanted to become a relationship coach herself.

DeSanto said her clients are successful professionals (like my friend) who want to find a partner. She said they feel frustrated and incompetent in their dating world, so they turn away from that part of their life and focus on work and career because that's where they feel confident and safe.

"They feel invisible and not seen or heard in romantic relationships," DeSanto said. "They are not able to see their own hidden blocks or barriers to having the life and love they want. I help them feel as confident and clear in their relationship life as they do in their work life."

With weekly sessions either in person, via remote video chat or phone, along with homework, DeSanto said she helps clients first find their tools and strategies to determine their vision. In other words, figure out what they want, what

they need and what their non-negotiables are.

The program includes discussing past relationship patterns, and what went wrong with former partners. But make no mistake, relationship coaching is very different than traditional therapy.

"We may talk about the past, but for the most part, we're in the present, talking about your relationship plan, where you are currently in your life and what's holding you back," DeSanto said.

The end result: DeSanto describes a client who goes through her program as, "a different person in the world."

"They make eye contact, they notice others, they have their head up," she said. "They're interested in the world on a social and relationship way instead of just work. They're more whole and open and they feel more hopeful and excited about living. That comes across to others."

If you're sitting here reading this, thinking, "Hmm, maybe I should try this," here's my opinion: I know if I really felt unfulfilled with dating and relationships, and if I had tried to meet someone for months and months and was unsuccessful, I'd start to look within, and it sounds exactly like what DeSanto helps people do.

Think about it. If you go out on 50 dates over a one-year period and none of them even remotely work out, don't you think it might have something to do with you?

Jackie Pilossoph is a freelance columnist for the Pioneer Press.

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