

A
**REVOLUTIONARY
VIEW OF**
Relationships

METAMORPHOSIS



THEODORE LOVELACE

Forward

“American society is blessed with free speech, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, and – on an interpersonal level – the freedom to choose who we date, how we conduct ourselves in our relationships, who and when we marry, and if we want that marriage to continue. We have the freedom to divorce, remarry, have children with or without a spouse, or remain single forever without societal repercussion. Along with our freedom, we also have an increased susceptibility for error; our freedom of choice allows us to choose poorly, regret decisions and act on that regret, and ultimately take chances we would never take if we didn’t have that freedom to end our relationships. So, why do so many of us play roulette with our love lives? And what are the dangerous decisions

– Where is the bullet???

Each stage of our “romantic life” lends itself to specific weaknesses in thinking, emotional reaction, and judgment. Our freedoms lead us to hold on to unrealistic expectations; they lead us to behave in reckless ways that hamper our ability to build and maintain strong, healthy relationships. Whether you are single, have just started dating and speed-clean your home before your mate arrives, or you have been married for over a decade and still say “everything is fine”, even when it’s not, chances are that you are playing roulette – and

eventually, the bullet will find the barrel destroying your relationships”.

From my book, “Relationship Roulette, Single, Married, Divorced.....Now What?”



Dedication

This book is dedicated to my wonderful children who have motivated me to great heights-
Ronnie (deceased), Hakeem, Joshua, Gabrielle, Caleb, Judea:

Throughout your life always remember how deeply and unwaveringly I love you because a
hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I
lived in, or the kind of car I drove.....

But the world may be different because I was important in your lives.

- Love,

Dad

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Introduction

If only we could all be given a nickel for how many times we have been asked if we were happy, especially when asked regarding our relationships.

People always talk about perpetual happiness, without realizing the fact that the happiness factor is also ephemeral. As we move on with life, our priorities change and so does the quantum of happiness. Just as beauty lies in the eye of the beholder, happiness is in the mind of an individual and more a matter of perception.

We all have those happy moments which are filled with fun and frolic. But then even as we try to experience and capture its essence, a wet blanket appears out of nowhere and dampens the whole thing. It could be someone's annoying habit, the change in climate, a sudden phone call, a knock on the door from an unwanted visitor, your soaring expectations or even your own self. So what to do if it rains on your parade to make sure that the happiness factor still lingers?..... Read this book in its entirety.

There, is your answer.

Happiness is always in the moment; it is after-all the state of being content. It is all in the

mind and yet it sails away in a flash. What really matters is how you are able to seize that moment and store the picture-perfect memories in a pocket of your brain and recreate those magical moments, whenever the happiness factor threatens to move the lines.

You can run after true happiness but believe that it actually lies in your hands. What counts the most is your ability to not let it slip through your fingers, giving way to discord and discouragement.

Running after the state of happiness is not necessary when you are able to appreciate the finer aspects of life and cherish even the little joys occurring 'in the moment'.

A Revolutionary View of Relationships

Let's get some things out of the way. I am not a millennial. This doesn't mean anything significant on its own, but it gives me context. The mantra today is that relationships and dating are more complicated than ever, given the technology, work environment, changing values etc., I would argue that they are less complicated. I believe that the optics of today via the media have fundamentally changed our perspectives on dating and relationships. If we strip away the veneer, we can actually get down to the meat of it. No one is an expert when it comes to love and relationships. We are all in the same boat. Some of us jump into the water a little sooner and a little deeper is all. Come on in..... let me show you.

We all have early and awkward dating experiences. It is part of the learning curve. It is one of life's rituals. These experiences imprint on who we are as adults. Not always positively, but part of life is learning from mistakes. No matter the age, the current dating scene can certainly look intimidating on the surface. I think most of us, if not now, at least previously, looked at the online dating scene in a negative way. It isn't difficult to see why. Movies, TV, and even experiences of friends and family can throw shade on the actual reality. It isn't that scary. Really. Step in..... the water is fine.

We are all in a rush these days. What does that mean? Work, friends, and family obligations eat up a lot of our time. This is a fact that has never changed. We tend to focus on what the media is telling us about our lives rather than living them. I confess that I drank the Kool-aid and believed the hype about complicated dating and relationships. The beginning of wider access to the internet in the early 90's was definitely a game changer. Instant communication and access to information would have seemed to complicate relationships. The shock of this technology as well as the added layer of smart phones and tablets has definitely added layers to the cake. In fact, it has made the cake an even tastier bite.

Why do we seek relationships? You could ask thousands of adults and get thousands of varying answers to this. This is the key. In fact, we have been answering our own question. The expression "not seeing the forest for the trees" comes to mind. There is no doubt that life

has become complicated in some ways, but this is a complication of our own invention. It doesn't take the citation of a scientific poll to know that a large percentage of people seeking relationships meet each other through dating websites. My mother, into her late 60s, went on many dates with suitors she met online. Although, I believe internet dating is more prevalent among younger generations, this is starting to change. All of us are looking for companionship. It isn't in the nature of men and women to be alone. In a world that is becoming increasingly smaller and in some ways more dangerous, healthy relationships are more important to us than ever.

What is the issue? Again, this goes back to optics, or how we see something. All of us know of someone that is divorced or came from a home with parents divided. We see the tree in the middle of the road and slam on the brakes. I recently explored several internet dating sites (names withheld) and went through initiation by fire. What I found incredible is that the sites are well put together and easy to use for potential daters. There are dozens of sites catering to all demographics and lifestyles. What I found incredible is how easy it is for the user to drill down on their search for a specific potential partner. I am skeptical but have an open mind to trying something new. The key to using these sites is to be completely honest about who you are and who you are looking for. After several days I received emails from several possible matches and corresponded back. I will not go into great detail, but I did go out on several dates with varied results. The dating site did not dictate the outcome of the date. This goes

back to my Sadie Hawkins experience (when the girls asked the boys out to the dance).

What I discovered from this recent experience on the internet dating scene as well as just life experience in general, is we are all seeking different things at different times in our lives. We have a great many options when it comes to looking for a relationship. One of the things we have forgotten, is that a date is a date. With or without the internet, it is ultimately what we make of it. Do we find someone with common interests, goals, and who enjoys cold Chinese take-out on a Sunday morning, or someone who will help us with the crossword puzzle? It is ultimately up to us. We can definitely make things harder than they need to be. What is your hurry? We are all in a hurry. Catch a cab, send a text, answer the phone. We are the captain of the ship. Sometimes we have to stop ourselves from looking at our smartphones. We are all guilty of this.

The key in dating and or relationships is taking the time to talk to the person you're with. Letting them know your interests and exploring theirs. All this technology can steer us into chaos at times, but it can also be our friend. It has revolutionized our communication. This has exponentially increased our odds in finding a future mate. We can talk to individuals all over the globe. Shared experiences make this a much smaller world, and a much cozier one. Our options have been greatly broadened. We are no longer consigned in our search of a potential mate by squeezing cantaloupes at the local market or Sunday morning church

mixers. These are tried and tested methods, but there is a whole new world of potential partners out there for those of us in the land of single.

Visualizing Your Ideal Relationship

What is Ideal? No, it isn't Tom Cruise or Beyoncé. Those of us in the realm of single have to actually think about this every time we go on a blind date or login to a dating site. I believe when we are looking for a relationship, we are not consciously aware of this question, but it is hanging out there like a bat in a cave, waiting for the dark. I took this question to survey single friends and family, including a few married ones. The answer is really quite simple. The ideal relationship is different for everyone. Many of the answers were the same. Companionship, stability, and family topped the survey answers. These were all great, safe and traditional answers; however they left the bat hanging in the cave.

Life's a reality show.

Life is a series of relationships; good and bad, long and short. Some meaningful and others completely trivial. For those who are married or in a relationship, that first meeting may have been as inconsequential as plugging dimes into a parking meter. Still the bat remains hanging. All of us tend to overthink and overwork most decisions in our life. We are stress-monsters, feeding on our on psyche. We model ourselves and our ideal relationships on our family, friends, and the media. This isn't a bad thing, but sometimes it clogs up the works, and muddles our understanding.

Visualization.

I am not getting into some transcendental meditation on the subject, but the idea is important. Who do we want, and what do we want out of our relationships? Humans are social creatures and I believe that not only is the search for a partner part of our primal instinct, but it has evolved into something more. It is as important as our basic need, like food and shelter. We crave companionship and love. Sharing our hearts and the poetry of our souls is embedded in our DNA.

If you are single, and if you're reading this book you probably are, close your eyes. Come on.... It is ok. No one is watching. Closed? OK. If there is someone else in the room with you right now they are probably quietly making fun of you. If you are alone, I would like you to think about your ideal partner. Visualize the physical person only, not their personality. The ideal. If you are visualizing Tom Cruise or Beyoncé, you are doing it wrong! (Just Kidding) This is more than a silly exercise; it is something we all do every day minus the focus.

All of us are attracted to different physical attributes, and that is a good thing. If the person you are visualizing looks like your favorite celebrity, that is ok. Visualize your ideal partner smiling at you. This sounds silly, but it really isn't. Part of this visualization exercise has to do with our self-esteem. Someone smiling in our direction makes us feel good, doesn't it? Frustration is part and parcel of our long struggle in the dating and relationship scene.

Our quest for love often causes us to feel hopeless and become negative. This has a noted effect on our self-esteem and transfers to our reality. Making our search more difficult than it has to be. Do you have the visualization of your perfect partner? Good.

Practical exercise.

We learn by doing. In dating, we all know there can be a learning curve and this is nothing to be afraid of. Knowledge is power. We can't have our perfect visualization of a partner hanging out there; all looks, and no personality. Some of us might find this ideal. I would like you to make a list now. I know you did not start reading this book envisioning it would end up with you doing manual labor but love and relationships are work. Make a list of all the character, emotional, and lifestyle attributes you want in a partner. Give your visualization a personality. I suggest 7-10 items. Keep it simple. Focus on the most important traits. Good sense of humor and wants children, etc. The longer the list, the harder it will be to remember. All these traits are the ones that are most important to you. There are no wrong or right answers here, just be honest and realistic. Pencils down. How did you do? This isn't a permanent list; after all it is for you. In fact, it will probably be changed from time to time, but the biggies will probably remain static.

Still have the visualization of your perfect partner? Close your eyes again. Add your personality traits to your partner. This isn't a fantasy exercise. This is something everyone

does when they dream. We know what we want, but sometimes we get lost when we cannot see it. Are you picturing Tom Cruise or Beyoncé, with a personality and a college degree, who wants 3 kids? Good.

Using your visualization.

The next time you go to your online dating site, bring out this list and spend a few minutes with your eyes closed, visualizing your perfect partner and relationship. I do not claim that there is magic here. It doesn't mean the next time you do a search you will find a soulmate; however, it is an important reminder of your goals. Love is a goal after all. An important part of this exercise is being consistent. Do it every time. If love and strong relationships are goals in your life, take them seriously.

One more small exercise.

You have visualized your perfect partner and relationship, but you also must visualize yourself and your own goals. Make another list of your own personality, character traits, and important goals. Match them up with the list you made for your ideal partner and visualize how this relationship would work in the future. The next time you go to your online dating profile, remember your visualizations and bring out those lists. You will go through your profile, make changes, and see more realistic goals. This exercise will help you to adapt your profile to your visualization.

Relationship Mindfulness: The Thought-Effect on Your Relationships

“Mindfulness is like that, it is the miracle which can call back in a flash our dispersed mind and restore it to wholeness so that we can live each minute of life.”

Thích Nhất Hạnh

How often do we stop and take a breath? Breathing is natural and we take between 20-30 thousand breaths a day. We would only give it a second thought, if it were to stop. Breathing is mindfulness. If our brain is dead, we do not breathe.

In our relationships, we do things, without thought, continually. Some good, some bad. Little nuisances like leaving the toilet seat up or down, accidentally washing our wife's slip with our red track sweats. These are thoughtless, but mostly harmless things that we do. Small things can accumulate into neglect and eventually cause pain.

Couples argue, and it is normal, in fact healthy at times. It is a sign that we are communicating with each other. In my former life, I hated confrontation and whenever my significant other would bring something up that made me uncomfortable or even hinted that it may turn into an argument, I would shut down. I would leave the room or remain silent (both really bad ideas). Nothing will make someone madder than non-communication. The fights

over little things became even more intense and I withdrew further. It became complete radio silence and our home became a quiet battle field.

I really do not need to tell you how this all ended, but it did not go well. I'm a stubborn man, but I'm not a stupid one. Circumstances in my life have forced me to actually do an internal inventory of my failed relationships. No one wants the fault to be theirs when it all goes bad. The truth is, none of us are blameless. Digging through the fridge on clean-out day to find out what stinks, is a really good idea. If something smells bad, it probably is bad... Unless, it's Muenster Cheese of course... (Delicious stinky goodness).

When we are in a bad relationship, we all suffer. Our partners, ourselves and children if we have them. Everyone is a victim. Our pride will not let us admit fault and the pain continues. In order to move on, we must remove the suffering from our lives. The thorn has to be removed. This isn't just Monday morning quarterbacking. And I'm even really a huge football fan now-a-day. It is more like having your own personal time machine (Doc Brown and his DeLorean will do nicely) and being able to travel back in time to visit yourself. Understanding who we were then, and why we were mired in depression and fear is a critical part of understanding who we are now. It is also a way for us to forgive ourselves. Nothing in the past can be changed, but we can learn to love ourselves again. Perspective is important and understanding where we went wrong in the past can help us to avoid it again later on.

Mindfulness involves being in the now. Understanding that everything that is happening is

now. This is really comforting to me. Overcoming the pain of the past is not easy, and the healing process can be slow. It is okay. We work through it, but with a few moments of mindful thought of who we are and where we are now, it can help us overcome the fear and anger that haunt us.

It is important in our current relationship to be mindful. I'm not talking about becoming a Buddhist Monk, (actually not a bad idea for some of us). I am talking about simple awareness. Being aware of who you are and understanding that you are human. Emotions are there for a reason. Without the pressure relief valve of emotions, at some point we would all explode. Being able to recognize that we are overwhelmed is the key to helping us open that valve.

When we come home from work and our partner asks us about our day... we must talk to them. I know, sometimes it feels like an inconvenience... Annoyance even... You have to be mindful of why your loved one is asking. They are doing it out of genuine concern and love for you. That is why you are together... right?

If it was a particularly bad day, take a moment. Let your loved one know that you love them and wish to speak to them about your day, but you need a few moments to reflect. Take a quick walk or go into a private place in your home. Take a few deep breaths. Think about each breath as you inhale, and each as you exhale. Only focus on your breathing. Do this for

about five minutes. Let your body completely relax. Let go and allow the cares of the day to slip away. This isn't always immediately possible, but that is OK. Taking a moment to reflect and release the pain and fear will be of great comfort and is a step towards mindfulness. Now, if you are ready, sit down with your loved one and let them ask you about your day. Be honest. If it was stressful, let them know. If it was great, also let them know that. Open communication clears up issues that may come up later on.

"Those who are happy are not without pain, they just know how not to be controlled by it." –
Love and Other Drugs, 2010

Love is stronger than you can possibly know. Being mindful in your relationship will only make it stronger. You hear about older couples, not exchanging a word, but when they look at each other you can see 70 years of love and understanding pass between them in a single glance. Mindfulness and love are at the heart of their relationship.

Most of us can only hope to have such a long-lasting love. With communication, mindfulness, and a little bit of luck, it is definitely possible. We must communicate our needs to our significant others and ask them to communicate theirs to us. Merely bull-doing through life is not enough. The world we live in is much more complicated and stressful, but this is no excuse to neglect ourselves or loved ones in the process. All relationships are work, even the ones that seem completely effortless (Darn those couples!), but this is a job worth doing right.

Morphing into Your Emotions - No Strings on Me

The phrase 'no strings on me' most of us remember this from Pinocchio and more recently, if you are nerd like me, Avengers: Age of Ultron. What does it mean? For me it means control. Many things can control and influence our lives, but our emotions can have the greatest influence over us. They are piano-wired strings that jig and jag us around like puppets. These are strings that cannot be cut.

Our emotions are part of us. The joy of watching our children grow, and the sadness of watching them leave the nest. Emotions are part of our built-in history. We wouldn't want to be emotionless androids moving from one task to the next. Our emotions can, however, be dangerous. Gepetto gone awry.... Dragging us across the puppet stage at inopportune times.

"I don't want to be at the mercy of my emotions. I want to use them, enjoy them, and dominate them."-from Oscar Wilde's, "Picture of Dorian Gray".

There are entire libraries of books dealing with emotions. No wrong or right answers here, but it is important to find what works for you. I am not talking about suppressing your emotions. Suppression is part of how our emotions control us. It is like trying to plug a crack in Hoover Dam with your finger; ineffective and dangerous.

Emotional stress is not always a bad thing. It can power us through difficult situations and actually increase our performance. Sadness is also useful and necessary. It helps us work through the grieving process when we have lost a love one. When we become overwhelmed in our day to day lives it is sometimes difficult to wrangle these emotions into usefulness. Deadlines at work, family, and or financial problems all take their toll.

Recognizing our emotions.

Before we can gain any kind of control over the puppet master we must recognize our emotions. Validation is an important step to understanding what triggers an emotional state. When you are becoming angry or stressed, simply recognize it. Take a moment to say to yourself: “I am feeling this right now.” Awareness, like knowledge, is power. This simple step will slowly relieve the pressure valve of emotion.

Self-Removal.

It is not always convenient to just leave an emotional situation but, sometimes, it is necessary. A stressful family gathering (Thanksgiving Dinner), for example. We have all been there and we can feel the stress and emotion as soon as we walk in the door. If you start to feel these emotions coming on, recognize them and step out of it. Even if you can only get away for a few moments... Do it!

Take a walk around the block, walk your dog, walk someone else's dog. or just find a solitary place for a few moments. Self-removal doesn't change the stressful situation necessarily, but it gives us a moment to breathe and recognize we are becoming emotional. This gives us a few moments to evaluate what is making us upset.

Causes.

Taking control of your emotions is impossible without understanding the root of the problem. Again, knowledge is power. Being aware of our surroundings is important and knowing that a particular situation or family member sets us off, helps us to control it. This is part of growing as a human being and creates inner understanding.

Even in our closest relationships with our spouse or significant other, losing control of our emotions can create serious problems. Emotions are like the silly putty we played with as children. You stick it to the newspaper and the print transfers to the putty. Emotions transfer. You may not do it intentionally, but when you are angry, sad or stressed your partner senses it. We have all blown up, unreasonably, at someone we love. Recognizing we have done it and immediately apologizing is important. Get this out of the way. Do not let it fester.

When we lose our temper because of stress, and lash out at loved ones, it starts building walls. It is critical to communicate with our loved ones. If we do not communicate and suppress our

emotions, we risk ultimately creating a wall that is too high to get over.

Puzzle box.

How do we put the 1,000-piece puzzle of our emotions back together? We really never do in a single lifetime. This is part of what makes us unique, and I'm grateful for it. We can, however, start a dialogue with them. The skeleton key to this is starting to find ways of relieving our pent up stress and anxiety.

Activities.

Meditation and exercise are just a couple of outlets we can use to start the conversation with Gepetto. We can't all run 5 miles before or after work, but we can take a short walk or even just spend a few moments without the television, stretching on the living room floor. The key here is to take a few moments to relax and contemplate the day. Keeping up a routine is important. You will be amazed at how quickly you will start to feel better.

Integrating the strings.

Understanding that we are emotional beings and having a dialogue with them is important to us and our loved ones. We forget to take a few moments aside from the hectic pace of our careers and this can be detrimental and even dangerous to our emotional well-being.

Relationships.

Becoming at one with your emotions is also important when you are looking to start a new relationship. If you are emotionally handicapped and tangled up in the strings, it is hard enough to take care of yourself, never mind trying to bring someone else into your life.

Write it down.

One of the things that I find helpful in life, no matter what I may be trying to do, is writing in a journal. You do not have to be an author to do it. I find writing things down to be a helpful release of stressful emotions. Make it part of your process. If you have a particularly stressful day, take a few minutes to write down what happened and what you think may have triggered it. Also write down possible solutions to the problem.

The important thing is to find a routine that works for you, and recognizing when you're tangled up in the strings of emotion.

Relationship Evolution Revolution

What do we do after we are dumped? Most of us hit the local super market for a gallon or two of double-chocolate fudge ice cream and tuck ourselves into the couch for a week or two and watch reruns of Downtown Abby. I still have the chocolate stains on my sofa cushion.

It always hurts, and we have all been there. For some of the luckiest of us it might have only happened once, early in our dating experience. However, for most of us it has happened at least a few times. A divorce after many years, or a break up after a few weeks in a new relationship. The complexity depends on the circumstance. All of them are painful. I have one divorce under my belt. Not proud of it but, I have eaten a lot of double-chocolate fudge ice cream and I'm wearing the stretchy sweat pants to prove it.

Everybody hates change.

Work comes up with new policies and procedures, or we have to go through the automated cash register at the grocery store. Humans are creatures of habit and generally detest getting out of their comfort zones.

The Truth.

The truth is, change is a good thing. These words are not comforting when coming out of a

bad relationship, I know. How many times did Thomas Edison try and fail before succeeding with the light bulb? Actually he failed 1,000 times before coming up with a viable bulb. Mr. Edison's famous quote: "I have not failed 1,000 times. I have not failed once. I succeeded in proving that those 1,000 ways will not work." Obviously we would not want to try 1,000 times before finding the relationship that works, but we do want to find the "one" that works.

You are not a failure.

When a relationship fails, regardless of the circumstances, we tend to blame ourselves. Having feelings of regret and depression are normal. Humans have emotions, and pain can be a great teacher. Dwelling on it however, is not normal. You are not a failure when a relationship goes south. This seems like an easy thing to say, but you have to believe it. You may have made mistakes or poor judgment calls, but you are not a failure. Again, you are human.

Devastation.

Especially after a divorce, we can feel betrayed and lost. Divorces can be more devastating because of the issues surrounding them. There may be children and or property involved, and the process can be gut-wrenching before it comes to a conclusion.

Do not rush.

Once there is a finality to the bad relationship, we start to move on. This doesn't mean we jump back into the dating scene immediately. Time to heal is very important at this stage because we are emotionally fragile. Focus on your work and re-evaluating priorities. Do things you did not have time to do before. Take an adult education class or get into a healthy exercise routine. This will help you focus on yourself, instead of the negativity surrounding the break up.

Evolution.

This entire process from the end of the relationship to this point is a personal evolution. The world moves on, and so do we. Every experience in life teaches us something new, but it doesn't mean we always enjoy the subject. The cliché 'time heals all wounds' is thrown around so much it has almost become white noise. I will not give clues to my age, (I watched Sanford & Son when they were not re-runs!), but I have been through a few things: divorce and deaths of family members. Time does heal the wounds, but what I have also witnessed is that every person heals in their own time. There are no guidelines on this sort of thing, and definitely no wrong or right answer to it. Do understand this: Things will get better!

From cocoon to butterfly.

You will know when you are ready to dip your toe back in the water. Being alone isn't a natural state for us (No. I'm not saying you're a freak if you're single). As social beings, we

reach out to others and want to be loved. Take things slow and make sure you have had enough time for yourself to heal.

Revolution.

Once the decision has been made to test the waters again, there is good news waiting. With today's technology, we have a variety of options available at our fingertips. Gun shyness is very normal. None of us want to be hurt again and that is always a risk. Frankly, life can be ruthless sometimes. Remember Thomas Edison? Trial and error. You have an advantage now and definitely know what you are looking for. You have evolved....and ready to start your personal revolution.

Winning.

With the internet and smart phones, the weapons of the revolution are far superior to those we may have had when we first hit the dating scene. There are several mainstream online dating sites (names withheld). We have all seen the commercials for them. In addition to the ones we may already know, there are literally hundreds of others for every preference, age, religion or lifestyle.

Take your time.

Make a list of what you are looking for and, frankly, what you are not. When you fill out your

online profile be as honest and complete as possible. Most of the online dating sites are user friendly, even for those of us who may be technology challenged (That is me). An added bonus to these sites, is they allow you to exchange messages or emails with potential dates. You are not committed to someone who has a pretty face, but may not have a matching personality. This allows you to take your time and gives you options.

Happiness.

The goal here is for you to be happy and to get on with your life again. Knowing that you have the control is empowering and actually will make the search more enjoyable. You have been through the fire and are a stronger person for it. Get out there and win the revolution!

P.S. Smile (If you've had a recent break-up, realize things will get better. I've got your back! :)

Theodore Lovelace

Don't Allow Others To Shape Your Reality

“NEO: Why do my eyes hurt? MORPHEUS: You have never used them before”.

-The Matrix 1999-

I love this exchange. (Spoiler alert) In the Movie “The Matrix” ... this is when Neo wakes up from a world he thought to be real. Instead, he had lived his entire existence in a virtual reality created by artificial intelligence. Neo has never really opened his eyes. Life is an opportunity to learn, and even during our darkest times we can come out the other side the better for it. We all have friends, some of them really close, others just ancillary acquaintances, but we are, in some way, influenced by all of them. Friends and family are sometimes false mirrors. We have a tendency to see ourselves through them, and the image is often distorted.

I’m very opinionated and stubborn. When I disagree with someone, I do it completely. This is a serious personality flaw when it comes to maintaining close relationships, and frankly, isn't very nice. It doesn't mean you have to be dishonest, but it does mean you have to use compassionate tact. How many times in your life have you made serious decisions based on the opinion of someone close to you? Have you ever left work feeling lower than low because a supervisor or co-worker made a less-than-kind criticism? No one likes to be put down,

negative words affect our reality. Perceptions of us by others, shape every aspect of our lives in positive and negative ways. There are teachers and coaches we admired while growing up. They encouraged and pushed us in directions we otherwise would not have explored. These individuals were positive role models and mentors who strengthened our self-image.

Maintaining a positive perception of ourselves is our reality and we have to use this as our guiding light. We do not have to lose friends to do it, but it may require a reevaluation of some of the people we surround ourselves with. How do we find out who we truly are? The answer should be self-evident, but most of us really do not know. We have just scratched the surface, and if our self-esteem has been comprised, it is even harder to figure out. I believe, perhaps naively so, that most people are good or at least well-intentioned.

In shaping our own reality, we have to be a little selfish. There is an honest assessment that needs to be made of our needs. This requires a little bit of work on our part, but it isn't that difficult. I am a big believer in setting goals and having a purpose for my life. It doesn't mean setting a goal for every single day, just in general. Particularly when it comes to career and relationships. If you are single, depending on your age, do you want to get married some day? Do you want children and how many? It is not rocket science, but it is important in shaping your own reality. There is nothing wrong with getting input from friends and family, but remember you are the one ultimately responsible for your happiness.

As I have grown older I am less tolerable of negative people. The older we get, time speeds up. I woke up one day and thought to myself... "I do not have time for negative people." It became a silent mantra. I did not openly discuss this with anyone, but during the normal course of life, those around with me with negative attitudes slowly began drifting out of my life. Losing some of them was very sad, but I realized that their negative reality was infecting mine. There wasn't an active campaign to get rid of them, but phone calls and texts became fewer. I realized that I really did not have much in common with them to begin with. This doesn't mean you have to sit down and make a 'naughty or nice' list, just be aware and stay in the present.

There is so much negativity around us, we often do not recognize it. Some radiate negative energy in waves, like body odor from a marathon runner. They may not even realize they are doing it at times. When we start paying more attention to our surroundings and those around us, it is easier to spot. Everyone has an occasional bad day, and can be forgiven for it. I'm talking about folks that issue a continual odor of negativity. A half compliment that is actually a negative remark. Crude sarcasm cloaked as a joke. A snide comment about the waiter at a restaurant. Putting someone else down to make themselves feel better. It is sometimes subtle, but always nasty and uncalled for.

There are endless arguments about nature verses nurture. Were we born this way, or are we products of our environment. I fall firmly in the school that we are shaped by both. I do believe, at some point, we become responsible for our own actions. It isn't acceptable as a 30-year-old man or woman, to blame their parents for bad behavior. It is time to swap out the Huggies, for responsibility. This isn't the Jerry Springer Show or the Bachelor, it is our reality and we have to own it. I wish I was able to say there was a magic pill to solve the problem, but there isn't. This will require real diligence on your part, and possibly the loss of a few friends (or people you thought were friends). If their negativity is infecting you and your reality, it is time to politely wash your hands of them and move on.

The importance of this new found personal reality is critical in the search for your destiny and a future partner. Having awareness and being in the present will change the way you conduct your search. All of this hard work in regaining yourself and coming out of the Matrix cannot be lost. Being selective doesn't mean you have to be overly critical or picky. No one is perfect and we cannot expect it. I have said this before, but the most crucial thing in life is your happiness, and by becoming self-aware and in the present you are well on your way to finding it.

Finding The Right Relationship

Life is messy, so is finding that perfect love. You have to be willing to get hurt and put yourself out there in order to find that fulfilling ‘Right Relationship’ (Jack and Rose in Titanic). Finding love in today’s world has never been so easy, yet so challenging. There’s no doubt that the internet has increased the opportunities to find true love in our world. It’s now much harder to be lonely in the first place– you can so easily reach out across all the social media platforms and connect to someone. Some relationships are formed as a cure for loneliness. However, it seems some people are forgetting the intimate bond and connection shared between two different people, the things that make relationships thrive in the first place.

It’s important that we don’t rush into any relationship just to prove we can find an attractive partner to placate our Facebook friends. Honesty with oneself about the real reasons behind entering into a new relationship is important. The cure for your loneliness is not necessarily a new relationship. You can still be lonely even in a committed relationship. The absolute cure for your loneliness is yourself. If you can’t be comfortable in your own skin and solve your own little quirks, what makes you think somebody else can do that for you?

The sheer peer pressure and demands of the real world can transition online to bring out some

desperation when it comes to dating. Some people will put up with anything just to say they have a significant other. To make matters worse, entire lifestyles are fabricated through pictures to fool prospective partners into assuming that they have an adventurous and exciting life. If you attract people under false pretenses, it can only come back to bite you later on. Before you know it, the real truth surfaces and emotions are shattered.

How to find correct relationship?

Taking the authentic route is the best way to go. There's no need to pretend you are something that you are not. A prospective partner may even appreciate your honesty— that would certainly be refreshing in today's climate. When you value yourself and what you bring to the table in a new relationship, there's a greater chance of attracting someone genuinely interested in you. At the end of the day, you have to live with yourself when all illusions fade away.

It's worthwhile not only to be authentic yourself, but to seek out those who are the same way. Many people in what they think are 'right relationships' now are completely unsure about where they stand in those relationships. Some are desperately unhappy inside, feeling powerless to make any changes.

Many choose to stay in relationships that hold them back physically, emotionally, spiritually, and financially, just to claim they have a partner.

Even worse, some choose obvious unhappiness because of the fear of being alone. It all stems from a lack of internal power and fortitude. It may take a little bit longer, but holding out until you find that authentic partner who enriches your soul will bring true happiness with the potential of going the distance. There's no need to settle for less than you truly deserve. The right relationship with a partner who can love you for who you really are is truly priceless.

Finally, the New You: Happy Birthday!

Have you ever rushed through an airport in desperation to catch that flight? You arrived just a little bit later than you would like. Rushing to the ticket counter, dragging that heavy roll-away suitcase behind you with a crooked wheel that keeps pulling you to the left. Frustrating? By the time you have made your mad dash and arrive, there is an amusement park-like line snaking back 30 or 40 people deep. This, I would dare say, has happened to some of us more than once. Airports are not fun, and just when we think we beat the crowd, there is another line. Once we slug our way through that line, we have the next maze of a security line (yikes!) Well folks, life is a series of lines. We reach one point of success, only to be standing in line behind the nerdy guy wearing the Captain America T-shirt in the movie theater line.

“Walter Mitty: I live by the ABCs: Adventurous, Brave, Creative”. –The Secret life of Walter Mitty (2013)

Success means different things to all of us. For me, it’s finding the tiny magnifying glass toy in the CrackerJack box. It means different things to different folks. It is always the perception game isn’t it? We do not always know what we want, and it changes all the time. It feels, sometimes, like we are chasing our own tails, but the great thing is we are constantly evolving. Are you ready for the new you? I certainly am.

It is said that our bodies completely replaces itself every 7-10 years. The, approximately, 70 trillion cells of our body entirely renew over that time. Essentially we have a new body. A new set of organs... Including a new heart, by the way. Ok super-science nerds don't write me on this! I'm sure this is probably up for debate, but let me enjoy this fantastic idea at least! What I really enjoy about the idea is having a new set of eyes and a new heart every 7 years or so. It is like hitting the reset button. Great idea, isn't it? Regardless of the fact or fiction of this, we all have chances to renew ourselves every day.

After recently losing a parent, I took a step back to reevaluate. I did not feel mortality suddenly coming on. Nothing as cliché as that. Our time here is finite and I have no illusions about it. What I did want to evaluate, and it shouldn't be prompted by the death of a parent, is my accomplishments and goals. I'm not in a competition, but there are things I would like to accomplish before calcium deficiency sidelines me! Taking time to see where we stand at a given point in our lives is helpful in achieving our goals and dreams. Awareness is always important, and getting through our daily work, and 'commitment' fog can be a hindrance to it.

Our body, may transform itself every 7 years, but if we are not careful it will leave the 'real' us behind. What I realized, during my self-examination, is that I had accomplished a lot and at the core I'm a decent person. Good news. And I say this because we all forget it from time

to time. Portrayal of negative self-images in the media bombard us with negativity constantly. Since the 7 year 'new body' theory thing, I have become incredibly fascinated about the rebirth of the new me. I do not have a magic clock that dings off at the end of the 7 years, so I am just going to say, my rebirth was today. I am the new me.

We will make our first 7-year new body commitment today. It doesn't mean we stop being held to our commitments or dedication to our careers, but it does mean we have to start thinking about taking care of ourselves. Part of making sure we live full and happy lives is to make sure we have fun. I know, what the heck is that? You could start by smiling. That is a little better... Try again, that last smile looked more like you had a bit of gas. OK, that is much better. Hold it for a moment or two. Not too much, uh stop..., now it just looks creepy! Practice that a bit, will ya?

"Life is like a movie, write your own ending. Keep believing, keep pretending." -Jim Henson

A smile is a great way to start the day. A lot of us wake up grumpy in the morning, especially on Mondays. Especially on Mondays. We forget to be happy. Happiness is about being alive. Wake up with a smile, it really works. The new you is contagious and this is a disease worth spreading. Take time out of your day to share the new you. I'm not talking about a crazy 'smile-cult' thing. I mean share your smile, and give out a few encouraging words to those

around you. It really does make a difference. Think back to the times that someone shared a smile or passed on an encouraging word. During your worst days, these little things make a huge difference. It is amazing how less stressful work is when you're happy and those around you know it. Part of this new you is making sure you maintain it. Being alive is hard work, and being happier, sometimes, is even harder. You will have bad days, as we all do. Remind yourself of yourself. What I mean is, just be aware when you're in a funk. It is easier to find the smile again, when you do. Practice living in the moment.

The new you is about deciding where you want to focus all of your energy, and this is no exception when it comes to the dating scene. Now that you have shed the old, ugly skin of low self-esteem and sadness, it is time to reevaluate your dating goals as well. Take a moment to go back into your online dating profile. That profile, after all, is the old you and needs some attention. Give it a fresh coat of paint. I was amazed how many things I changed in my own profile. My priorities and who I was looking for changed a lot more than I thought. Change your profile pictures as well... After all, this is the new you. Show off that new and improved smile and self-confidence.

The new you is finally here.

Happy Birthday!

Theodore Lovelace

<https://www.facebook.com/Theodore-Lovelace-Relationship-Series-598679210206259/>

