

How to Navigate the Maze of Internet Relationship Advice

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A computer and access to the Internet: That's all you need to share your opinion with the world about how you think people should manage their lives, relationships, finances...you name it. It seems like overnight, everyone has become a potential "expert" about some particular issue.

Nowhere is this more apparent than with relationship advice. Thousands of "how to" articles are just a click away ("How to keep your man happy, even when he doesn't give a damn"; "How to recharge your libido and make love for a week straight"; "How to find your soulmate without even looking"). It's mind-boggling.

But which advice should you consider? Which advice is likely to do more damage than good? And how do you make sense of contradictory advice? Here are a few suggestions to help guide you.

3 things to consider about relationship advice:

1. Approach the advice with a healthy dose of skepticism

It's important not to view any piece of advice as gospel. Much of the marriage advice and relationship tips floating around in cyberspace are based mostly on someone else's *opinion* rather than research-based findings.

And each person's opinion is colored by his/her own particular personality quirks: the advice of a person who suffered through the pains of divorce as a child may have strong anti-divorce leanings; the person with a high libido may tout the wonders of sex as the ultimate way for couples to deepen intimacy; the person who was repeatedly hurt in relationships may highlight extreme caution before making a serious commitment; and so on.

Keep a "Shop around" Mindset

When you go clothes shopping, you probably don't buy the first outfit you see. You're selective: you seek out what might look nice on you and then you try on different items to see how they fit and to test how comfortable you feel wearing the new clothing. If it doesn't fit, you move onto the next piece of clothing. Approach advice in a similar way: if it doesn't fit your needs (or the needs of your relationship), shelve it and move on.

By nature, advice is somewhat generic--a one-size-fits-all approach to helping people; since your relationship is unique, some of the advice you read will be irrelevant to your life.

2. Listen to your gut

Marriage and relationship advice should be *transparent* and make *intuitive sense*. For instance, a piece of advice suggesting that you and your partner take a "time out" when an argument becomes too heated is sensible and easy to understand—after reading this advice, your reaction might be something like: "That's what my husband and I should be doing more of" – this is the kind of reaction you want after reading advice.

But what if you come across advice that makes the hair on the back of your neck rise, or you just can't wrap your mind around how a particular suggestion could help your situation? Since you are the ultimate authority and expert on your relationship, it's best to trust your gut reaction in these moments. You don't want to exacerbate your relationship struggles by following advice that isn't a good fit for your particular needs.

3. Consider the source of the advice

Timmy and Cindy have been dating through their whole sophomore year of high school and they're head over heels in love—Timmy is convinced he's discovered the "secret" of deep intimacy and true love, and is ready to share his relationship wisdom with the world. So he starts a blog and offers his advice about how to make any relationship work.

Barbara has been married eleven times and she's certain she's got it right this time around. So she writes articles about everything she's learned on her journey to finding Hank, her "one and only soulmate," and she's determined to help you find Mr. Right.

Would you alter your relationship based on Timmy's or Barbara's advice?

There is a great deal of sound relationship advice on the Web, and there are a great deal of clichés and opinions passing as advice: some advice is sound, some is innocuous, and some is nonsense and should be avoided.

If you're tempted to try something new in your marriage or relationship based on someone else's suggestions, take some time to find out about the person who wrote the advice. Visit his/her Web site and read the "about us" section. Read other articles this person has written and see if they make sense. If you're still uncertain about the author, go one step further and email him/her and ask questions—if s/he has the time to tell you how to live a better life, then s/he has the time to answer your questions.

Here are some questions to consider:

If this person is calling him/herself an "expert" or "guru" or any such similar term (anyone can label themselves an expert), what are his/her credentials?

If the person has a degree, is the degree relevant to what s/he is writing about? (For example, John Smith writes about relationships and says he has a Masters Degree, but it turns out his degree is in economics.)

Is the advice based solely on the person's personal experience? Or is it also based on research findings and/or counseling work with couples?

How long has the person been an "expert" in the field of relationships?

One last Caveat:

When trying something new to improve your relationship, you should never compromise your values. While personal and relationship growth involves moving out of one's comfort zone, it doesn't mean you have to abandon your principals and core values.

There is wisdom that can be found when you type "relationship advice" into a search engine. The key is being able to recognize whether that wisdom applies to your union. Someone who's been in a stable, healthy relationship for the past thirty years might have some very good advice to share with the rest of us. However, what works for one couple may fall flat for another, and that same advice might make things worse for yet another couple. Remember: as you read the advice and opinions of all the relationship gurus out there, *you* are the ultimate expert about what will and won't work for your relationship.

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Author Bio

Dr. Nicastro holds a Ph.D. in psychology and is a marriage and relationship expert. Over the past fifteen years he has helped hundreds build stronger, more fulfilling relationships. Dr. Nicastro has lectured at several universities and now conducts workshops for couples on a wide range of issues. His relationship advice has appeared on television, radio and in national magazines. A member of the International Coach Federation, Dr. Nicastro is passionate about coaching and believes that healthy relationships can add meaning and fulfillment to our lives. His goal is to guide individuals and couples as they implement the skills that will allow their relationships to flourish.

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