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# The laws of love

LAURA CARTLEDGE meets a policewoman who is helping people to track down their perfect partners.

**A**wingman is a well established part of tackling the dating game, but what if you could have a police officer by your side in the hunt for the perfect partner?

Tara McDonnell is offering just that with her matchmaking service South Downs Introductions, which combines experience in the force with a realistic outlook on love.

The Hove business is clearly hitting the mark as, in just three years, it has been recognised by the UK Dating Awards and boasts more than 2,000 clients.

"I think that they think I still have access to the police systems," jokes Tara who spent 12 years in the police.

While the two professions may seem very different, intuition and interview technique bring them together as she insists on offering something more than the 'tick box' method of other dating sites.

"You ask open questions, if you are interviewing a suspect you don't ask closed questions like 'were you there?' as you'll just get a no," explains Tara, adding that nothing is left untouched – particularly the big topics like religion, politics, children and career – before clients even meet.

"I've done all the groundwork so they can be assured that person has pretty much everything they're looking for," she smiles. "The only thing I can't guarantee is chemistry."

However despite her no-nonsense, rigorous approach and use of instinct, Tara refreshingly admits she thinks love takes time.

"Big believer in second dates," she states. "It is very hard to make a decision on one meeting if that person is the one for you for the rest of your life."

Proof can be found in Tara's own relationship with partner Dave which she describes as having been 'slow-burn at first'.

Despite meeting at work, she confesses 'he

“People need to be open-minded and not judge, you can't define attraction”

never looked approachable' and it wouldn't be until years later – and a chance meeting due to a mutual passion for sailing – that things began to fall into place. There were no sparks and fireworks initially, it was about four or five times before something clicked," reveals Tara. "Then I realised he was the person I wanted to call or be with."

So what does she think can be a hurdle to finding happiness?

"People can be their own worst enemy when it comes to love, they will say 'they aren't my type' or they will have a list and I think that is not what love is about at all," replies Tara. "You want someone to have a cup of tea with and hold your hand and listen to how your day was, not that is 6ft something with lots of hair."

"People need to be open minded and not judge, you can't define attraction."

Having been single for most of her 30s, it was Tara's disillusion with online dating

platforms that convinced her both that a personal touch was needed and that her professional skills could be key.

"Online dating works for some but other people use it like they are shoe shopping, just flicking through it, you can't meet someone like that. You have to be in front of someone," she insists. "I can never guarantee people will fall in love, that is the bit I can't control – if I could I would be selling it by the bottle-load. But I can help people meet wonderful people."

Something, Tara says our 'time poor' lives can get in the way of.

"People are very time poor now, they work longer hours and then when you get to the point of your life when all of your friends are settled down you don't tend to go out or you go to diner parties where you can be the only single person there," she reasons. "After all, they aren't going to come knocking on the door and say 'hello, I believe you are looking for Mr or Mrs Right?'"

Instead Tara prides herself on going out and bringing them to clients.

"They say a matchmaker doesn't switch off," she laughs, "I will see someone who is attractive – male or female – and think I would like them on my books wherever I am."

Motivation comes from the 'over the moon' feeling Tara gets when a pairing pays off.

"It is just a wonderful feeling when you know you have created something," she says simply.

South Downs Introductions, which covers Sussex, Hampshire, Surrey, and Kent, is now in the process of expanding the service to London.

To find out more visit [www.southdownsintroductions.co.uk](http://www.southdownsintroductions.co.uk)



Tara McDonnell