

# ***Please Try This at Home***

## ***Monthly Tips for Increasing the Joy in Your Life***

### **Stop Getting Duped by “Potential”**

Have you ever felt like you had a “sixth sense” about people, at least in particular situations? Like your intuition tells you whether someone is angry, lying, distressed, attracted, or a shady character before other people pick up on it? If so, what you probably appreciate about this skill is that it gives you a head start on deciding how to be most effective in that situation. Just as with any superpower, though, this kind of sixth sense comes with its own version of Kryptonite. And unless we understand and correct for it, it can make us much *less* effective in certain situations.

Most often, the Kryptonite has its way with us when two things are going on. First, there is a vacancy in some relationship or role in our own lives that we are trying to fill: we’re dating, looking for friendship, hiring someone, or seeking a community of like-minded people. And second, we *really* want to fill the role because the vacancy has been painful and perhaps quite extended. It’s in these situations that our sixth sense detects what seems to be another person’s strong *potential* for being qualified to fill that vacancy. We get a powerful and sometimes even ecstatic feeling that we have found the one we are looking for. Months or years later, it turns out that the person had *no actual ability* to succeed at the role we invited them into. Somehow, our sense about their “potential” was totally off.

It can look like this: During her first few dates with Sam, Intuitive Isabelle felt passion and understanding like she’d never felt before. Sam not only seemed to really “get her,” he was also able to describe a life they could pursue together that captured longings that she’d hardly been able to admit she had! The only thing in the way of their dream life was Sam’s long-term unemployment. It was amazing how many odd circumstances had blocked him from landing a job right at the last minute! As a result, he was facing foreclosure because he couldn’t afford the repairs that would let his house sell. He was living on mac ‘n cheese, which he just hated because he wanted Isabelle to be treated like a princess, not paying for their dates simply so that he could afford to hang out. After dedicating a year, \$5,000 of her own money, and using her entire network of resources to pull strings from Sam, Isabelle realized that things mysteriously kept blocking him from completing the career and relationship goals he’d talked about so passionately. How could she have missed that, despite Sam’s seeming passion for life and for her, he was totally unable to take action toward the goals he described so beautifully?

Or it looks like this: After interviewing 30 job candidates, Sensing Salvador finally settled on Nadja for the job. In the interview, she was able to describe exactly the kind of project plan she was looking for, with details about how she would accomplish it and even some creative ideas for project add-ons that could be easily included. Nadja’s references described her as energetic, congenial, creative, and entrepreneurial. Two months later, Salvador found that the project was behind schedule. Nadja’s team seemed to enjoy working with her, but as Salvador investigated who had done which tasks, it seemed that, without noticing it, even, the team had done all the work. He couldn’t find anything Nadja had actually brought to the table without another person’s effort. When he confronted her, the meeting went well and Salvador left feeling reassured. But two months later, he again found the same thing occurring. How could he have missed Nadja’s total inability to do independent work?

Have you ever dated someone like this? Hired someone like this? Taught a student like this? Made a close friend like this? I sure have! During the beginning of the relationship, you feel elated, excited for the potential of what is coming—something better than you’ve experienced before—only to find yourself scratching your head months or years later, dumbfounded at the person’s total lack of follow

through. How does this happen to smart, intuitive people like us?

## How We Get Repeatedly Duped

Sometimes, our typically-accurate sixth sense gets overridden by the strength of the other person's sales pitch about who they are and what they can do. Others can sometimes be so convincing, either intentionally, out of conscious deception, or inadvertently, out of a lack of self awareness, that they woo us into believing that we are sensing genuine potential in them.

More often, though, the Kryptonite that scrambles our intuition about what's going on with other people has more to do with us than with them. When we believe that we are sensing another's potential to fill our vacant role, what we are actually sensing is our own longing to have the pain of the vacancy go away. Our "sense" really has nothing to do with the other person's qualifications for the role we are looking to fill. We so want to find Mr. or Ms. Right-for-the-Situation that we make up our own sales pitch about them by primarily paying attention to the "right" details about the person and rationalizing away or ignoring the "wrong" ones. Wanting our search to be fulfilled, we may even unconsciously ask the person questions or lead them into situations that prompt them to say the things we want to hear and be the way we want them to be. Often, since they are also excited for the possibility of what we are presenting, they put their best foot forward for awhile, trying to fit what we want them to be even though that's not who they really are. Neither party is intentionally being deceiving or duped. It's just that both want something that's not realistic to work out so much that they both act the part as long as they can in hopes that they can make it come true.

To make matters worse, the more times we've been duped or disappointed, the more intense our desire may be for the right person to come along. Even though we may deny the strength of our hope that things will be different this time because we are scarred from being disappointed so often, deep down our longing is *still* intensifying as we hope that this *next* person will not only do what we had hoped for originally, but now also be skilled enough to make up for all the other disappointments along the way. Yikes!

## Dupe-Proofing Our Relationships

So if we are battling not only others' deception or lack of self knowledge, but also our own intense desire that's fed by repeated disappointment, how can we possibly avoid being duped and disappointed over and over again? How can cool observation overcome the intensity of our longing?

### 1. Rely More on Fiftieth Impressions than First Impressions.

Let's get a bit mathematical here for the solution. Remember vectors, those arrows heading off in various directions that start with a dot? Well, say we're a vector. We've got our starting point—the place we're at right now; we've got the direction we're headed, based on our personality, skills, and desires; and finally, we've got the pace at which we're moving toward our goal or direction. So how do we know if someone else is a good fit for us because they are really headed in the same direction and pace that we want to go?

The first time we meet them, we get their starting point: where they are at at the time we meet them. And we tend to get really excited with that initial point seems to be really close to where we're at at the current moment. The problem is that there is no way in a first meeting that we can know the direction the other person is headed or the pace at which they are moving in that direction because all we get at the first meeting is a single point of data. We've got to watch the person over time to see if, not just in words but also in behavior, if they continue to head in the direction that we are going. We need to test over time to see not only that their starting point matches ours, but that their whole vector is actually parallel to ours in the same direction, rather than traveling further away from us as time progresses.

That doesn't mean we can't get excited about a first meeting. That would take a lot of the joy out of a new relationship or job, right? But it does mean we should remember that our excitement is just an initial impression that may or may not reflect someone's long term abilities.

## **2. Pay Much More Attention to Actions than Words.**

We can also protect ourselves by asking two very important questions: 1) Based on this person's *words*, what is she/he hoping to do? 2) Based on the *actions* we've seen this person take, apart from words, where does this person seem to be heading? For example, someone might say that we're *so* important to them, they are *so* excited to be with us, and they would do *anything* for us. But when we check out their actions, we notice they are always late (prioritizing other things above our time together) and they make us change our plans to make room for time together, while they won't change their plans for us. Their *word* "vector" may be parallel to ours, but their *action* "vector" tells a different story: that they aren't into us enough to change anything about their life to make ours easier. We're a convenience to them, not actually important to them. Which vector is the real one, the one that captures the person's actual abilities and motivations? You guessed it. The *action* vector every time!

## **3. Get Other People's Take on the Person.**

Other people are less likely to feel the same longing that we feel about getting our relationship vacancy filled. So they are much less likely to sense false "potential" in someone. Introducing them to our latest love interest, new friend, or prospective hire over time and then asking for their honest feedback can help us to see what we've missed in the person because of the strength of our desire.

We do have to be careful with this, though. If we're the boss and we're using our subordinates as our "dupe-proofers," they are much more likely to tell us what we want to hear rather than what they actually think for fear of displeasing us and putting their jobs in jeopardy. It's better to find a non-subordinate for that kind of thing. We also have to take with a grain of salt the opinions of those who want us to associate with a certain kind of person because it will make *them* feel better, i.e. the parent who wants us to marry a doctor for the social status or the best friend who wants us to date a sports lover so that our attendance at weekly football games is not disrupted. The best dupe-proofers are people who feel equal to us and who have enough self awareness and skill to set aside their own interests long enough to give us an honest and minimally biased assessment of the person we are considering.

## **4. Learn and Correct for Your Personal Dupe Pattern.**

Do you seem to date, hire, or make friends with the same kind of bad follow-through person over and over again: the bad boy, the femme fatale, the flake, the leech, the stick-in-the-mud, the back-stabber, the abuser? What did these people seem to have in common at the beginning, the middle, and the end of their relationship with you? What were the very first tiny signs you saw? Did the flake show up to the interview ten minutes late? Did the abuser seem slightly annoyed when you wanted to hang out with your friends rather than him that first time? Did the leech start texting you four times per day within the first week of acquaintance? See if you can write out a full description for yourself of the kind of person who seems to dupe you again and again. Then, each time you have a vacancy that needs to be filled, pull out that description and see if there is *anything* that feels similar between that past pattern and the current person you are checking out. If it's quite similar, cut the relationship off as soon as you can. If you're not sure, hang with the person a little longer and watch to see if the similarity continues or decreases.

As someone who has been painfully duped in past hiring, friendship, dating, and community experiences, I very much hope that following these steps that I have learned the hard way can spare

you some of the disappointment I have experienced! If you or someone you know would like help exiting a repeated “dupe pattern,” feel free to call me at 303-931-4284 for a free 20-minute consultation or email [info@jenniferdiebel.com](mailto:info@jenniferdiebel.com).

Thanks for reading!

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