

## How to Avoid Marrying a Jerk.

I think the best place is to begin with a disclaimer. The disclaimer is that jerks have no gender. For if we would ask the women, have you known another woman that you just said to yourself, oh, she is such a... \_\_\_\_\_--“jerkette”--now that was the word that came to your mind, right? (I never ask that question to the men, because you know it will get them in trouble).

However, this program is really about a lot more than just avoiding jerks—it is about how to build a relationship in a safe way and how to have a clear understanding about what that other person is really like so that when you are married you have no big surprises. If that person is a jerk, well, at least you knew it before you married.

Seriously, there are people that are very difficult to be with in a relationship—both males and females. If I were to try and give the definition of a "jerk"—just for the record—it would have to be a person that has a *persistent resistance* to change. This is a person that just doesn't want to change. This person is very difficult to be with in a relationship because as you grow, they don't; as you see needs and make changes they resist.

I must confess that when I was first writing this material about seven years ago I turned on the TV and a movie came on with Steve Martin in it titled "The Jerk". Steve Martin's character portrayed a man who had an unbelievable lack of insight. He just never could see himself from another person's perspective. Did you ever know someone like that? He personified a “jerk” (or jerkette)—a person who is difficult to be with in a relationship, let alone be married to for the rest of your life.

But as I said earlier, this program is really about a lot more than just avoiding jerks. It's about building safe relationships. There are three parts of what we're going to do during this plenary: first, I am going to preview the overall curriculum and give you a taste of what the program is really like. The second (probably the last ten minutes) I'm going to provide you with a brief description of the materials in the program. Then, lastly I would like to sketch some of the new horizons for the PICK a Partner program.

Again, thank you all for coming. It's very wonderful to have you here. It's been a great conference so far!

There is a question that I have asked myself many times. At this point, I've been married more years than I was single. This July I will have been married 25

years. See that's how you get applause...perseverance!

My wife and I have been married 25 years and I have asked myself, “How did I ever get involved with working with singles and single-again individuals, helping them get prepared for marriage?”

I realized that my interest really peaked about the time that I became interested in gun collecting... which was about the time my oldest daughter became interested in boys! We knew we were in trouble when she was in 8th grade and was invited to three senior proms at three different high schools by three different boys. That was the time when I found guns fascinating (actually I don't own any guns, just psychological testing inventories).

The whole dating relationship can be very intimidating. We live in a time when people are obsessed with dating and mating and yet we have never had a greater period of absolute confusion about *how* to date and choose a partner, what to look for, and how to make it work. Jerry Seinfeld described going on that first uncomfortable date can be compared to going on a job interview... that lasts all night long.

I can remember getting a haircut a couple years ago and the hair stylist said to me, “You know, your one ear is actually a little higher than your other.”

You know, we struggle with self image enough. We really don't need help from those beauticians that are trying to make us look good. I thought to myself, “If I were single and I went on that first date and I sat across from her and and we were chatting back and forth, I would be thinking of only one thing—is she looking at the one ear that is higher than the other? Is she thinking that she will have to wake up, look at me in bed some day after we are married and have to tilt her head to level out the world?”

This whole idea of dating and choosing someone to be a life partner is intimidating! The higher the desire for quality, the more we make a big deal out of having good relationships—the more pressure there is. We need to give tools to singles before they are in a serious relationship; tools to help them to know how to go about building not only a relationship that is safe but also how to have discernment in figuring out what that person will be like some day as a future partner.

I have been a counselor working with couples and families for 15 years in private practice and many years ago I began asking individuals that had come out of very unhappy relationship, “Did you see any indicators of the problems back when

you first started dating this person?”

I would get one of two answers—“yes” or “no.” Those that said “no” said that “if only I had known then what I know now. If only I knew what things were important to really get to know about somebody back then, I could have definitely seen the signs. In retrospect, I see them now.

The people that said “yes,” they were interesting. Almost always they said, “Yes, we saw them but we just overlooked them because we were too much in...(love) you know it. But it is not pronounced like that, it's in luuuuuuv. Say it with me, in luuuuuuuuv. They would say, “I saw the problems but I just overlooked them because I was too much in love.”

These two areas I believe have caused the “Love is Blind” syndrome. The “Love is Blind” syndrome simply says that we either have an *underdeveloped understanding* of what to get to know about somebody or we have an *overdeveloped attachment* that is blinding us to areas, critical areas that we really should pay attention to. They are predictive—like a preview. They are like the dark clouds on the horizon before a storm. They reflect the need to have a harmony between the *head* and the *heart*.

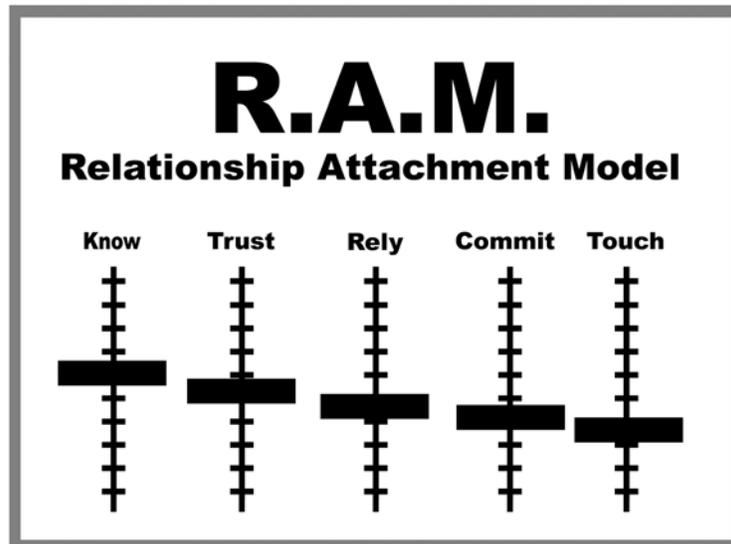
So basically I am going to present you with an overview of the PICK program that is about the head and the heart. First, there are five areas that the *mind* needs to get know about somebody that helps to predict or foreshadow what they are going to be like in a marriage. Because we all know that when you are dating somebody, the way that they treat you in a dating relationship is going to be just how they are going to treat you in a marriage, right? No! So what is predictive? What will give you some kind of a picture of what that person will really be like in marriage? There are key areas that research has evidenced, has surfaced, that help us to get to know their marriagability. So I am going to briefly review these five areas. We go into more detail in the curriculum, but I will briefly describe them in this plenary.

The second major area to keep in balance with your head is your *heart*. Because even if you get to know the right stuff, if you become over-attached, you are going to overlook the key predictors in those critical areas. So we need this balance between the head and the heart.

I developed a model of what you see up here, the Relationship Attachment Model, or the R.A.M. for short. This model posits that there are five bonding processes or five bonding dynamics that go into all relationships. They are universal.

We all experience them and they interact, working together. So let me go through this model.

The RAM looks like a graphic equalizer on a stereo where the sliders go up and down with the first relationship dynamic, how well you *know* somebody, being on the far left. When you first meet someone, you don't know them very well. But as you get to know them, it becomes bonding. You have met people here at the conference. As you get to them, isn't it bonding? You click with somebody, and you feel good and they share some things about themselves and then you identify with it and you feel connected as you get to know them.



I was flying out to Concordia University to present the program in a graduate program for marriage and family and I sat down in my seat on the airplane and this woman sat next to me. She was probably in her mid to late 50s and had a great kind of gregarious disposition about her. I asked her why she was going to St. Louis (where I was laying over). She said, "I'm visiting my children and grandchildren as a number of them are married and live in St. Louis." I said that's wonderful.

She asked me where are I was heading? I said, "Well I am going to catch another plane and head out to Concordia University. I am going to present a program out there that I wrote."

She said, "What's the program?"

I said, "Actually it's called *How to Avoid Marrying a Jerk.*" Well, she busted out laughing and said, "Where were you when I needed you—I have been married five times."

So two hours and five marriages later... that's right, I sat and heard about all five. So when we stood up to leave and were standing in the aisle what do you think she did? She gives me a big hug. She felt "known" and that made her feel bonded to me. But that is how it is with relationships.

You start very low but as you start to connect with somebody this can start to zoom. Do you *really* know them to this high level after two hours? No, but it made her feel a trust in me (second relationship dynamic)...which made her feel that I would be there for her and she could rely on me (third dynamic). And if there had been a priest, or a rabbi, or simply a judge... I would have been number six.

This is how the relationship dynamics of the RAM interact. If you are not careful, they can be misleading; a little deceptive—but as you get to know somebody, the point is that it is bonding. Getting to know that person and being known creates a bond. How do we describe our best friend? Nobody knows me like they do. Knowing and being known.

The second bonding dynamic in this model is trust. Oh, I need to give you a definition of knowing somebody, by the way. If you want to get to know somebody what do you have to do? There are three T's. Somebody give me one T... "Time". You are right but that is the last one that usually nobody ever gets. What is something else? "Talk"... "Togetherness". So you need to spend time talking, and you need to get together. How do singles build relationships a lot of time now? They talk, sometimes over a small amount of time. They spend time talking where? With their fingers, over the internet. The danger of getting to know somebody in an internet relationship is you are not together with them. Do you remember building that relationship with that special person and getting to know them, listening to stories about their family—and then you went and met their family. It's not always the same!

So you need to get to know somebody with talking *and* togetherness, over time. This leads to a growing *trust*. Now when you think about trust, it is somewhat of a nebulous, abstract concept—but I am going to define trust in more of a mental way. Trust comes from your mental picture of someone. You start to sketch an image of another person in your mind so that your expectations are generated from this picture. It tells you what you can expect when you are not with them—your mental picture tells you what they are doing. And when you get together with them this expectation tells you how they are going to greet you, treat you, and so forth. Your mental picture of someone is very dynamic. It tells you whether you can trust them or not. What is the picture based on in terms of accuracy? It should be based on how well I really

*know* the person? The better I know a person the more accurate my trust picture should be.

So as you start to build this trust then you also begin to determine the extent you can depend on a partner. Reliance, right? This is the third relationship dynamic that contributes to your overall bond. As you begin to build reliance it bounces back to also increase your trust. Then you begin to work on commitment, the fourth relationship bond. Commitment is the degree you invest yourself in another person. How much do I belong to you and how much do you belong to me? As people build a relationship there is a growing sense of belonging to each other. The fifth and final source of closeness is the relationship bond of sexual chemistry and touch.

Now I'm going to suggest to you that these five bonding dynamics operate in all relationships, although you just set different boundaries. Even in a nonsexual relationship you are still a sexual being. You take your sexual self everywhere you go. So all five relationship bonds contribute to the feeling of connection and closeness; are active and affect your relationship—whether you are married or unmarried.

In marriage, for example—this is kind of a step away from the program—but in a marriage you sometimes start to drop on how well you know each other? What happens to the bond? Does the trust sometimes become sabotaged? What happens to your bond? Do you find that you are not meeting each others needs like you used to meet each other's needs? The bond begins to also become affected. Sometimes you begin to lose commitment and we don't feel like I really belong to you anymore or you to me. There is this reciprocity between these. What do I do for you and what do you do for me? Then sexual touch can begin to be challenged and lessened and lowered in a marriage relationship. Each of these is very dynamic in and of itself but they interact, causing your complex feelings of closeness and love.

When you develop a new relationship there is a safe zone to build that relationship in and it is very simple. Don't let one level on the RAM exceed a previous level. Don't go farther in your sexual *touch* than the level of your *commitment*... don't go farther in forming a commitment than your level of *depending* on the person to meet your needs... don't look to a partner to meet needs beyond the level of your *trust* is... and the image you form of what a partner is really like shouldn't go farther (in your trust) than what you really *know* about them.

You can see how dynamic these five “love bonds” are. If they are growing together they form a safe relationship. They ought to move together at a steady pace. I believe that this model can help explain not only healthy safe relationships but this

model can help explain unhealthy relationships. For example, did you ever see a relationship like this? (*Trust is moved to the top with know and the other levels low*). What kind of person forms this kind of relationship with trust at the highest level and the others at the lowest level? A person that is overly naïve; too trusting. Have you ever seen a relationship like this? (*Reliance is moved to the top with trust and the other levels low*). We have books and books written about this type of relationship with reliance at the highest level. They are called what? Codependent relationships. This even happens sometimes when you know that there are things that you can't trust about a partner, you still are too wrapped up and dependent in this relationship. Can you see how this would be unsafe?

Have you ever known a relationship like this, with commitment higher than the others? This is the kind of the relationship where the person breaks up and they are having a panic attack because it's been two hours since they have been in a relationship? Did you ever know someone like this? They just need to belong to someone? I am freelancing right now and I don't belong to anyone. They feel a need for security. They end up building that bond of commitment too fast just to regain their need to belong to someone.

And I know none of you have ever seen a relationship like this where sex is at the highest level with the other four relationship dynamics practically nonexistent. This is unsafe physically and emotionally! The point is that when you are building a new relationship help these five dynamics to grow together in an even way.

There are times in a marriage relationship when the commitment level is here at the top but something has broken the trust and it is at the lowest level and you don't feel like you can depend on the person... yet you know more about them than you have ever known. This is still a vulnerable and unsafe relationship but it is maybe the kind of bond necessary to bring a couple through a very, very difficult time. When you talk with that couple the partner that is committed to one that they feel very little trust will tell you, "I am committed to work on this. I will believe in healing but I feel very unsafe because I know that I am so vulnerable."

If we are working with singles we have to help singles to know how to build a relationship, not in this kind of disjointed way with any one area at the highest level but in safe ways by letting the levels move together. We need to get this message out that there is an order to building a bond...there is a logic to love. There is an understanding. There is a safe zone. Let the levels work together. Move together.

Let me just give you a quick example. We will imagine a female beginning a

brand new relationship. I will try and imagine this from a female's standpoint. This girl meets a man and goes out on a date. They go on their date, have a great time, and he walks her to her car. She doesn't know him real well at this point. He says he had a wonderful time. As they are saying goodnight he says these important words, "I had a wonderful time, can I call you next week" - which to her means what? Basically just the opposite...he will never call again.

So she looks downcast, he picks up on it. He says. "I tell you what, what are you doing on Sunday? How about if I give you a call on Sunday? I'm doing some things but I will be home by 5:00. I will give you a call about 5 o'clock."

At 5 o'clock on Sunday what do you think she is doing in her apartment? She's looking at one object in the apartment... the telephone.

When it rings, she answers it, and it's him, it's Bill. How are you doing? Wonderful. Okay. They go out again and have another great date. Her trust does what, up or down? It goes up a little bit, not too high though. She feels she can depend on him a little more and now she is feeling good. (*Move the know trust and rely levels up a little on the RAM*).

They go home after the second date and he says, "This was wonderful. How about if I call you next Friday...around 6:00 PM."

Friday at 6:00 when he says he's going to call, she is watching the telephone again. At exactly 6 o'clock, the phone rings. She answers the phone—it's Bill again. She is pleasantly surprised. Does she know him a little better? Yes. She's getting to know him a little better. What's happening to her trust? It went up a little bit. She feels like she can depend on him a little more. The other levels are going up as well. This goes on for a couple of months.

In the third month he says, "Listen, Sunday evening why don't we do something. I'll call you at 5:00."

She says, "Oh, how about three?" "Three is great," he says. "I will be coming home from downtown and I'll have my cell phone, I'll call you then."

Sunday afternoon, 3 o'clock comes around; do you think in the third month she is still watching her phone? No—she is not even looking at her phone or even paying attention to the time. Her trust has risen. Trust lowers your critical judgment. But three o'clock comes and goes, no call. Three fifteen, no call. At 3:30 she notices the time...checks to make sure her phone is working and she has service. At first she

wonders if something happened. She tries to call but his phone immediately goes to voicemail. She knows what this means.

By 5:00 she is talking to her phone. Do you know what she's saying? "Why are you not ringing?" "Great! He sets me up for two months to trust him and then he shows his true self."

Where is her trust at 5 o'clock? All the way down. "I thought I knew him. I cannot depend on this guy." What else drops? (*Move all the levels of the RAM to the bottom*).

At 5:15 the phone rings. She answers it. "Hello!" It's an ambulance driver. He says, "Listen, do you know a man named Bill?" She says "Yes." He says, "Well, there was a horrible accident. Somewhere around 3 o'clock he was walking across the street downtown, trying to dial something on his telephone, and became distracted and got hit by a car. As we were putting him into the ambulance he grabbed my arm and said, 'Please, you have to call this number and tell this woman what happened.'

I am sorry but I was busy and neglected to call you about this. He is in the hospital and in stable condition.

At that point, how high do you think her trust goes up? (*Move the trust level to the top...and then rely and then commit*). You know that her rely would also zoom up... and that she would be inclined to marry the man before he even awoke from his coma in the hospital!!

Do you see how these things work? Relationships are very dynamic and these bonding dynamics are also very interactive. It is important to help educate singles before they are in that "Love is Blind" syndrome to pace a growing relationship so that they don't become over-attached. They need to keep a balance what they really know about a partner (the head) and how deeply they become emotionally and physically involved with that partner (the heart).

So as you build a relationship and pace your heart what *are* the areas that you need to get to know? There are five important areas to get to know that I have put in the acronym FACES. The first one is (F) family background.

***Look at the way affection and aggression were expressed in the family of origin***

There are important areas of childhood experiences that predict what we are

inclined to do in the families that we create. If that is true for you then it is also true for the person that you fall in love with. Sometimes these influences are dormant and stay hidden until you get into a marriage. In other words, certain family roles and scripts don't come out until you are actually married. So you need to look at the past family dynamics because they will tell you a lot about what that person is going to be like in a marriage that may be very different than how they act in the dating relationship. I am only going to describe one of the three areas covered in the PICK Program.

The first one is this whole area of showing emotion—from aggression to affection. I grew up in a family of five and I was the youngest. My father was less affectionate with the kids but quite affectionate with his wife, my mother. When I was twelve years old my mother was diagnosed with colon cancer and struggled with it for about 2-1/2 years. On the first day of my sophomore year of high school she passed away.

My older brother went off to his freshman year of college. My next oldest sister transferred to a new college. And my oldest two sisters were married. So it was just my father and I in our large six bedroom farmhouse living more like two bachelors than a father and son. He is Dutch English but the best description would be he has a bit of traditional roles in him so the kitchen was not a room of the house that he had ever really entered. After my mom passed away my father and I were left standing in the kitchen looking at each other. He was hungry. I was too. He asked me if I was going to cook. Well, I didn't cook. I asked him if he was going to cook. He shrugged his shoulders, he didn't know. We may have not eaten much but these experiences were bonding.

Now before I continue let me say that the PICK program emphasizes a three month rule that says you really cannot get to know somebody very well until you at least have been together three months. You could refer to this as the 90-day probation period. When you are getting to know somebody at first you are just getting to know singular events. How they acted in the moment. But we all get to really know somebody according to their patterns, right? How they act in some kind of a predictable fashion which requires time to figure out. In fact it may take the first three months for these patterns to even start to surface. The divorce rate for people that have married after dating less than two years is significantly higher compared to those that wait two years. You need to understand that my dad married nine months after my mom died to a woman that he had known just shy of three months.

My first presentation of my program seven years ago was at Eastern Research

Association and it just happened to be held that year in South Carolina on Hilton Head Island where my dad and my stepmom had retired. When I told my father I would be visiting he said, “Great, I have never heard this program that you wrote, and I want to come hear it” (which meant that I would have to take out half of my stories).

If you are in education you will know that the titles of presentations in these conferences are like the *Alpha-beta of Classroom Effectiveness* and *Pi-squared of Learning Styles*; all of the imaginable titles that look dull and uninviting to attend. And then there was the title in the conference brochure, *How to Avoid Marrying a Jerk*. So, I ended up presenting in a packed room... with my father right there in the middle of the pack.

At the completion of my presentation I asked for questions. Only one hand went up. You guessed it...my father. I looked around like any good teacher would as if his hand was invisible. “Any questions, anywhere? Please, questions.” I kept thinking to myself, “Dad, you drove me here! You are going to drive me back to your house! Please ask me your question in the car!!!” When I called on him he stood up and he said "I'm John's father". What you need to understand is that I was experiencing serious regression at that point. I couldn't tell whether I was 35 or 5. Did you ever see that cereal commercial where the person transforms to who they were as a child? That was me.

So he says, “John’s mother passed away when he was in high school and I didn't follow the time-frame described in this program. But it's worked out very well and we have been married twenty years. So sometimes, there is an exception to the rule.” And he sat down.

At which point I was relieved. I agreed and told my father he is a very lucky man...he made a good choice and has had a second wonderful marriage. It is true that there are exceptions but we should not base our norms on exceptions. So I reminded the class of the classic Clint Eastwood movie, *Dirty Harry*. The final scene was a shoot out with the scumbag that Clint had been pursuing the entire movie with his gun just within his reach—Clint, on the other hand, had his gun in hand pointed at the crook. The tense moment culminated when Clint asked the infamous question: “I know what you are thinking, punk...’Does he have any bullets left in the chamber?’ But I just have one question for you...do you feel lucky?” So when you have only dated someone a couple of months and are staring down the barrel of the matrimonial gun, the key question is: Do you feel lucky?

Well, there you have it—that’s my father. So, there we were in the farmhouse

together and I can remember missing my mom and the warmth she brought to our family. I wanted to hear my father say I love you. At that time I don't remember him ever saying it. I don't remember hugging my father although I do remember him hugging my mom and holding her hand. But at times of loss you want to feel a connection and I remember thinking about telling my father that I love him and wanting him to say it back.

I went up to him in the evening when he was reading the newspaper and I said, "Dad, I'm going to go to bed now." He looked over the paper and he said, "Alright good night." I said, "I just wanted to say something before I go to bed--Dad, I love you."

I remember that awkward look on his face when he responded and said, "Uhh, me too." It wasn't what I had imagined. I thought to myself, "Well, this established the fact that one of the two of us is loved. I love him and... he loves himself too."

Well, as I mentioned my father remarried shortly after the end of the school year and I became very independent. It was a rocky time through high school for me. But somewhere towards the end of my senior year I had quite a dramatic change of faith which had a great impact on my personality, goals and beliefs. One of the things that I determined to do was to hug my dad every time I went to college, look him in the eye, and say, "Dad I love you." So as I would get ready to go to college I would give him a big hug, and say, "Dad I love you" and he would say "me too." I would come home from college, give him a big hug and say Dad I love you and he would say me too.

We have comfort zones. I had to get out of my comfort zone and he was getting pulled out of his comfort zone. You know what happened? He began to say I love you too. Now at age 81, he says it to me all the time (and others too). I don't ever get off the phone without him saying, "John I love you."

And I say, "me too" (just kidding).

How is affection demonstrated in the family? What is amazing is that two people will get married and then they will complain years later that they don't like how the other person shows (or doesn't show) affection. How did they show affection in their family? They didn't? Did you ever think about that? No. They were all over me for those first three months. Duh!

It is amazing how we are obsessed with relationships and yet how confused we can be about relationship development. We know that family experiences shape and

influence what we bring to a marriage and yet during the dating years we overlook this and only see a partner as an individual.

Singles need a crash course on family theory and assessment. I have taught advanced marriage and family theory in a graduate program in addition to my practice for a number of years. The PICK curriculum provides a guidance system (like a GPS) because there is not a lot of guidance for singles anymore. Families aren't guiding them. Society certainly isn't. Singles need to understand their own families and the background of those they date.

Of course, you are not destined to repeat whatever happened in your family. Change is possible...but only with intention and effort. You all can make changes. I worked at making changes. There were things that I liked from my father and my family that I wanted to repeat, and there were things that I wanted to change. If we teach singles—you need to figure out what you want to repeat and what you want to change about your family background—and you also need to know your partner's family background and what they are likely to repeat and what they have worked at changing. Change is possible but change is not possible without key ingredients.

The first ingredient in change is that you have to get a little insight. You need to be able to see your issues and also understand how these issues affect others. Not only do you need insight, you need to get some new information. Just because you did something wrong does not mean you know how to do it right! This new information will help you if you work hard at it. That will bring about a change if you practice over time.

### ***Change is Possible***

- ***Insight into your issues***
- ***New Information and a new plan***
- ***Hard work***
- ***Practice over time***

However, do not confuse changing yourself with trying to change your partner. I believe that the most at-risk people in terms of singles are good-hearted singles. Good hearted people are gracious and forgiving—if somebody has a blunder, they overlook it. They are good hearted people. They often say to themselves, “I can change you. I went to a Smart Marriage Conference just to learn how to make you a better partner for me. I bought a lot of things, especially at the booth, right toward the entrance, second one in! I bought a lot of stuff and I learned how to make

relationships work. You don't even need to read a book because I read them all for you and I know you even better than you know yourself. I work hard and have deep insight into you!

Bottom line—marry your equal. If you work hard at personal change, marry another person that is hard working at personal change. Just don't think that you can change someone who is not working to change him/herself. Get to know the family background. Check out what a person has taken from their past. Believe that change is possible but not without these critical ingredients. And pace your trust, reliance and sexual involvement so that you can get to clearly know what a person is like in the other key areas—like a partner's conscience.

### *Look at the attitudes and actions that reflect a partner's conscience*

The conscience is not talked about near enough and yet it is extremely important to get to know because it reveals what you can expect from a partner. Relationships skills are wonderful but the conscience oftentimes mediates whether you use those skills or don't use those skills. I could talk about some research studies that actually showed that improved relationship skills with lower conscientiousness ultimately led to poorer relationship outcomes. But this is common sense. Take stereotypes of professions. What is a stereotype of a profession where the person has wonderful relationship skills but a really poor conscience? “Used car salesmen.” Good relationship skills, poor conscience. “A politician...a lawyer.” I am sure that this does not apply to anyone here attending the Smart Marriage conference! All of you here have very high consciences—especially all of the attorneys that are here (we don't need any law suits). When you get upset with somebody you do not always use the relationship skills at your disposal. It is your conscience that puts you into their position. It is your conscience that makes you feel guilty for something you have said or done; and it is your conscience that helps you to see something through their eyes, from their perspective. This conscience is crucial in a long-term relationship, especially a marriage.

My oldest daughter had a number of dating relationships with boys who had poor consciences as you can see from these gray hairs. Somehow the boys that she dated began to get nicknames in our family. I will never forget the first one that came in. Morgan was still getting ready. I let him in and was talking to him. I went to check on Morgan and when I returned, he was gone. I started walking around the house looking for her date. He had never been in our home before, it was their first date, and I couldn't imagine where he went. I went into the kitchen and his head is in the refrigerator. He looks over door and says, “I am just getting myself something to

drink Mr. Van Epp.” He earned the name the “Space Invader”.

Probably the most famous of all was “The Mole”. Do you know what moles look like...long pointed noses? If we were doing a cartoon and we had a mole as the main character, how would he talk? “Eh-eh-eh”? Well, that is exactly what he sounded like...and he did have a somewhat pointy nose. We had a finished basement and he always wanted to go down in the basement. I said to her one day, why does he always want to go down in the basement? Is he comfortable being underground? Does he live underground? Does his family live underground? What is he—a mole? And that stuck.

We should have seen the handwriting on the wall. On their first date, they came out of the movies to a torrential downpour. Now ladies, what is it that you would worry about getting wet on your first date? Right, your hair. Well she looked at him and he romantically looked at her and said, “I’ll race you to the car!”

Now I know that this sounds like a little deal. But this is exactly how you get to know the conscience. After so many *little deals* add up you eventual get...a *big deal*. In other words, as you get to know somebody you see “singular events” that may be *minor*. But over time, these events add up to reveal patterns which often are *major*. This is how you get to know both good functioning and poorly functioning consciences. Over time you see the patterns of a good conscience by putting together the “little things”—which then help you to see the patterns of this person’s conscience and also helps you to feel confident that you know how this person will act and treat you in a long-term relationship. The maturity of a partner’s conscience is crucial to figure out when you are falling in love because if you marry, you end up living with their conscience.

### ***Look at the potential for compatibility between you and your partner***

What is another area that you need to get to know? Compatibility Potential. The PICK curriculum review three areas of compatibility: personality, values and lifestyle compatibility. It is important that you and your partner are similar in many of the values you hold. This is also true for some of the aspects of lifestyle like recreation, interests and work. However, people often marry someone of a very different personality.

My father is quite the *punster*. When he was married to my mother, he would make jokes and puns and my mother always seemed to get them. For instance, whenever I would peel a banana, he would look and say, “Now that's an *appealing*

banana.”

I hear all of you “ahhh” because you don't think it's that funny, do you? But do you know how many times I heard that? I like bananas. I grew up hearing that a lot! Or when I got a new shirt he would say, “Hey, come here...is that a new shirt” while grabbing the cloth with a chunk of my skin underneath and say, “Oh... it's *felt*.”

When he remarried, he married a woman who didn't seem to get his puns. I can remember standing in the kitchen the summer they married. She was peeling a banana and he walked in. “Say,” my father predictably observed, “that sure looks like an appealing banana. “

“Not really,” my step mom replied, “it's got a bruise right here.” The interesting thing was that their incompatibility became a breath of fresh air for me. For together, they were funnier than my father had ever been on his own!

Compatibility says how are you similar? And how do you blend your differences?! Take a close look at the personality, values and lifestyle of a partner you are seriously dating?

### ***Look at the examples of how a person acts in other relationships***

A fourth area to check out is a person's relationship track record. How do they treat others? I am talking about everyone from strangers to “ex's”... family members, friends, co-workers, even their pets! You can tell a lot about how you will be treated by adding up these examples.

### ***Look at the relationship skills that a person practices***

There are key relationship skills that you should also consider...communication openness, congruency, emotional stability and conflict resolution... these skills cannot be seen immediately but will be evident over time. Relationships are frameworks that should produce growth in your life. Like iron sharpens iron, a good relationship will make you better in these skills. And there are countless books and classes (just look around) to assist you in this journey.

In the PICK workbook there is a section at the end titled *99 Questions to Answer in Dating*. I know 99questions sounds like a lot, but there are about 20 questions for each of the five areas to get to know. Now I realize that you can't go on that first date, sit down across from your honey and whip out this workbook and say,

“I went to an interesting class called “How to avoid marrying a jerk” and I thought that as we are waiting for the appetizers to come I could just flip through some of the questions in the workbook and have you answer them... uhhh, how did you know that your mother loved your father.”

I realize that there is no speedy way to get to know somebody. It takes time. But if you don't know the questions you need answered then over the course of time you may never ask them!! You need answers and you have to learn the patterns, not only of the present but also the past. Because not only is it true that *the apple doesn't fall far from the tree* (family background) but it is also true that *history usually repeats itself* (examples from other relationships).

### ***Five Areas to Grow to Know***

***F***amily Background

***A***ttitudes & Actions of the Conscience

***C***ompatibility Potential

***E***xamples of Past Patterns

***S***kills for a Relationship

Let me take these last couple of minutes and review two main things. First, pace your growing relationship in a way to avoid the *love is blind* syndrome. The Relationship Attachment Model provides a conceptual picture of what goes on in the bond of your relationship—so build your relationships in safe ways... keeping the levels growing in concert with each other.

So by pacing your hearts you will be able to use your heads and get to know the right stuff. Get to know family background. Get to know what the attitudes and actions of a person's conscience. Get to know how you are compatible—you similarities and differences. Get to know what relationship scripts are practiced in all of the other relationships. And get to know the extent of skills in communicating, resolving conflicts and relating in general. If we teach singles the right way, we will empower them to “measure a thousand times, but cut only once.”

What is the P.I.C.K. a Partner Educational Program—PICK stands for Premarital Interpersonal Choices & Knowledge? Its five to ten sessions (depending on the version). Each one is 1-2 hours long. The DVD version has five sessions just shy of an hour each. There is a PICK participant workbook that provides the outline of the material, exercises and activities and many discussion questions.

It is a “certification in a box” meaning that you can become certified by either attending a certification training class or by watching the certification course on DVD. This DVD set comes with the PICK Instructor Packet. You can purchase it, take it home, sit in the privacy of your home and watch the course. Then you just go online to [www.nojerks.com](http://www.nojerks.com) and take an online test to become certified and teach the program. You also receive your certification number for discounts on participant materials and gain access to the private section of the website for Instructors.

You say where is this being taught? Where is it being used? The PICK program is used from the public school system to private schools on the high school level (there is a High School curriculum version of PICK with student workbooks), all the way up into college, it is even being used in course work and we have templates for the syllabus and lesson plans. It has proven to have great diversity in age, culture and ethnic background and is effective with both never-been-marrieds and singles-again. All military branches are using the PICK program and we are currently conducting a study with the Army and Ohio State University.

We need to start a movement throughout our society that will expand into subcultures and even other societies—and this movement should be a *mate selection/marriage education movement* for singles! In other words, we need to teach singles how to build relationships and we need to teach singles how to choose partners. Life has changed so dramatically. Families used to be involved and guide the process. Societies used to have norms. However, we have become highly diversified and the world is the melting pot of many cultures... so we need to teach singles how—on their own—they can build a healthy relationship and sort through the complicated areas of a prospective partner. That way we can promote prevention and redemption. Think of how many singles we have. How many people have been divorced and are broken-hearted and need to find a redeeming relationship. This is why PICK is used by so many coalitions, social work organizations, churches, prisons and other organizations that help heal and empower singles.

In closing, I would like to have all of you join with me. Please stand, and I am going to teach you the No Jerk salute. Take your left hand and place it over your heart because it is with the heart that you fall in love. It is with the heart that you know somebody and trust them and commit to them and form that great relationship attachment, that feeling of bond and closeness. But while you have your left hand over your heart, take your right hand and with your index finger, tap the side of your head. Love does not require a lobotomy... you need to use your head. You need to have a balance between the head and the heart (and we have 2x4's for some of you). If you can harmonize your head working together with your heart then you maximize

success in your relationships. You are made to work together. You CAN follow your heart without losing your mind!