

Creative Dating¹

I know she's been on many dates, so I'll have to be creative if I'm going to make this date unique...What if I ask her to go on her "worst date" ever?...Yes, that would be unique! Now, what should I do?...Let's see, hummm, I could wear my plaid suit, plaid shirt, and plaid tie...I could bring her some wilted roses, and some of my pink grapefruit...We could cruise Glendale Avenue...How about a trip to the laundromat? I'll bet she's never done that on a date...I could bring along my high school yearbook...What if my car stopped running and we have to walk to our destination?...If she's still with me after all that, I could change my clothes and take her to a nice restaurant-like Bobby McGee's...That would certainly be a memorable date!

What is a Creative Date?

That was how I started planning my first creative date. So, you ask, what is a creative date? A creative date is a unique shared experience between two people that can include romance, laughter, excitement, challenge, growth, communication, and just plain fun. A creative date may include a visit to an alligator farm, a progressive dinner through fast-food restaurants, a trip to the zoo to watch the people watching the animals, a game of croquet, or maybe breakfast in a hot-air balloon. Anything new, different, exciting, or challenging has the potential to be the subject of a creative date. Experiences like these allow you to get to know your spouse or special friend better. A creative date can be one of the most thrilling and memorable experiences in your life.

How does a creative date differ from a typical date? For most people, a typical date consists of picking up their date, going to dinner or a movie, and returning home. Nothing unique or different occurs. No effort is put into producing a memorable experience. In other words, boring! A creative date, on the other hand, requires planning effort, produces a memorable experience, and tells your friend that you value your relationship with him or her. One creative date experience may do more to cultivate that relationship than six months of regular dating.

What are some examples of creative dates? The possibilities are endless, but some of the ones I have been involved in include:

ABC Date: A great way to relearn the alphabet! For each letter of the alphabet, my date and I visited a spot that began with that letter. For example: we **d**rove through **d**owntown Phoenix, so we could **e**xercise at **E**ncanto park, from there we **f**ound the **F**airgrounds, then we **g**awked in the windows at **G**oldwaters, and after a **h**ike up the **H**yatt **h**otel we became **i**ncognito on **I**ndian School road, **j**uggled tennis balls at **J**erry's, and **k**issed at **K**-Mart! Afterward my date said that she learned more about Phoenix in those six hours than she had in the previous five months that she had lived here.

Tape Date: This was an economical date! A friend and I recorded various songs on a cassette tape. We then drove our dates to various places and performed some action that related to the song playing on the tape recorder. Some of the things we did included eating dinner at McDonald's (to the tune of "Grease"), blowing bubbles ("Tiny Bubbles") and eating M&M's ("Candy Man") at the park, dancing at the entrance to the Arizona Biltmore ("Celebration"), and searching for small creatures in a dark alley ("Spiders and Snakes"). Our dates enthusiastically participated in every activity except the one we suggested to accompany Ray Steven's song, "The Streak"!

¹ This paper was originally written by Dwayne D. Gremler for Dr. David Lynch's MBA communications class at Arizona State University in March, 1988.

Italian Date: It was Rome in the middle of Arizona! Three girls invited me and two other guys to their apartment for an evening of wine, women and song. We dressed Italian style, ate Italian food, stomped grapes in the bathtub—all six of us at once—to make Italian wine, and finished the evening eating spumoni at an Italian restaurant. None of us will ever forget the experience of removing the grapes from between our toes!

Blindfold Date: This unusual date occurred when I was traveling in Switzerland. I asked a girl in my tour group if I could kidnap her for the evening. She agreed, so I blindfolded her and took her to explore downtown Lucerne. I described the buildings, parks, and people as we walked through the city. I removed her blindfold when we arrived at a beautiful park that over-looked the city. This was our first date and it went extremely well; she married me fourteen months later!

Why Plan a Creative Date?

Why should you go on creative dates? Because they're fun! Anyone can plan a creative date. You don't have to be extremely rich, good-looking, or intelligent. You just have to care enough about your friend to put some effort into producing a memorable experience for him or her.

Creative dating helps open the door to knowing another person better. Most people feel extremely awkward trying to formulate questions for conversation during their date when nothing is going on. You will find that conversation flows much easier during most creative dates.

You may also get to know other people better as you plan and execute your creative dates. Most of your friends would enjoy helping you design a date. In planning my "worst date ever" I asked several of my friends about their worst dates. Not only did I get plenty of ideas, but I also got to know each of my friends a little better. Some of them even volunteered to help me conduct my worst date. Because I planned to use their suggestions, my friends were very anxious to hear afterward about my worst date ever.

In dating, as in many other things in life, the anticipation of what is going to occur can be almost as much fun and exciting as the date itself. As you begin to plan and visualize your date, you will find yourself really looking forward to the time you will spend together with your date. I once planned a surprise date that included a day trip to San Diego, and I had a hard time concentrating at work the entire week before the date because I was thinking of the fun we would have together on the weekend. You shouldn't find it surprising that the more effort you put into planning a date, the greater your anticipation will be.

Isn't Your Date Worth It?

In spite of these reasons to date creatively, many people put little effort into planning a unique shared experience. Most people don't think about using their creative abilities to plan a date. As children, we all used our creative minds when we buried treasures, went puddle jumping, skipped rocks, and played hide and seek. Who says that kids are the only ones allowed to have fun? It may be a somewhat rusty from the lack of practice, but you do have a creative mind!

Time is another excuse that people use to explain why they do not plan creative dates. Obviously, the time needed to organize these unique shared experiences is considerably greater than the time required to plan a trip to the movie theater. But isn't your date worth spending the time to please?

Some people believe every detail on a date has to go exactly as planned; therefore, the more they plan, the greater the probability that something could go wrong. Don't take dating so seriously; you'll just make yourself—and your date—miserable during the entire experience. You must remember that your best plans will be subject to problems with traffic, weather, and mechanical break-downs, but don't let that stop you from enjoying your time together.

Designing a Creative Date

So you agree that there are no good excuses for avoiding creative dates, right? You're just not sure how to start planning a creative date. To understand how to create a special date, you need to look at why you date at all. A date is time spent with another person for your mutual enjoyment and the building of a relationship. In order for healthy relationships to grow and be maintained, you must spend significant amounts of quality time together. If you really want to spend time cultivating a relationship with another person, you must begin by putting your date's interests first.

You will need to know what pleases your special friend if your desire is to make your date enjoyable for him or her. Be observant when the two of you are together. Ask questions. Make a point of searching for clues to likes or dislikes. Then include these things when planning your date. By making the effort to include things that your friend feels are special, you communicate that he or she is important to you.

When designing your own creative date, one of the greatest sources for inspiration is other people's ideas. The idea for one of my favorite dates, the ABC date mentioned earlier, was borrowed from a friend of mine. Ask your friends about their favorite dates; you do not have to use original ideas exclusively. Swap ideas with other people, and brainstorm on new variations. Don't be afraid to look to others for ideas. *Creative Dating* and *Mr. Romance's Book of Love* are two books that were written specifically to be used as references for new ideas. *A Wack on the Side of the Head* is an excellent book for stimulating new ideas or helping you to look at things in a different way. Remember: what makes a date unique is the personal way in which you combine the many different ideas that you have collected.

In addition to friends and books, you can find creative date ideas in many other sources. The daily newspaper and magazines such as the *New Times Weekly* are great places to look for unique and different events. You may find it helpful to keep a folder or notebook as you begin to search for creative date ideas. Whenever you see or hear of an idea that sounds interesting or fun, write it down. One thought or idea can trigger an avalanche of new and unique ways to spend quality time with your special friend.

Pick a Theme, Any Theme

Perhaps the easiest way to start designing a creative date is to decide upon a theme. You could plan a red date—wear red clothes, ride in a red car, eat red meat, drink red wine, and see the movie “The Lady in Red.” A backwards date might consist of doing things in reverse order: you could start by kissing your date good night, followed by going for dessert, then to a movie, then dinner, and perhaps you could walk backwards everywhere you go. You could plan a 1950s' date with several friends that includes borrowing someone's 1957 Chevy, recording a tape of 1950s' tunes, going to Ed Debevic's restaurant for dinner, and having a sock hop to end the evening. Many themes are out there waiting for you to use them as the basis of a creative date.

Get on With It

You have now been exposed to creative dating. Creative dates can be some of the most memorable experiences of your life. Anyone can design a creative date. The extra effort that you put into producing a creative date experience for your special friend communicates the value you place on the relationship. You have plenty of friends, books, and other sources of ideas available to help you design a creative date. If you place great value in the relationship you have with your spouse or friend, place a corresponding amount of effort into the way you demonstrate that value. Go ahead, plan a creative date! You—and your date—will be glad you did!

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