

LOVE IS IN THE AIR

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When it comes to flirting, she knows all the moves

By Nancy Shoet West Globe Correspondent, Updated February 1, 2019, 12:07 p.m.

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Mind-body therapist Judith Swack dances with her husband, Terry Furman, in their Needham home. (Matthew J. Lee/Globe Staff)

For those lucky extroverts, flirting comes naturally. Whether out dancing or waiting in line at the Apple store, they can strike up a conversation and let the rest unfold.

But for many people, it's not so easy. Fortunately for them, there's Judith Swack, a mind-body therapist who teaches "Flirting and the Psychology of Instant Attraction" at Newton Community Education and other places.

"Flirting is the very first signal that you give to someone that you are sexually interested in them," Swack said. "It's in that first 10-minute interaction that you need to make a connection."

Swack, who also holds a doctorate in biochemistry, traces her interest in the fine art of flirting back to her own days as a young single woman nearly 40 years ago. "I kept having one disastrous relationship after another and finally decided I needed to study it seriously to figure out what I was doing wrong and what would actually

work,” she said. “I did a lot of studying, a lot of practicing, and over the years I found out what succeeds. So now I teach it to other people.”

Swack urges her students to go into a social situation with the mind-set that “everyone is so unique and different. It’s like going on a vacation to a foreign country. You start with the attitude of ‘I’m going to have a little travel adventure right now.’ You’re going to meet someone, have an adventure, it doesn’t even matter what happens in the end.”

On the more practical level, Swack advises her students who wish to light a spark with a stranger to “approach the person, smile, and give them a compliment. Compliments bring people up. It makes them smile and lean

Inevitably, in this day and age, people — especially men — worry about being misconstrued when they try to flirt. But Swack has a technique for that, too.

“If you approach somebody with a compliment and they don’t come forward and rise to meet you with energy, they’re not interested in you. You say goodbye.” And even if a dialogue does ignite, said Swack, “I teach the seven-minute rule. If you talk to someone for seven minutes and their energy doesn’t come up and meet you, walk away. After that point it’s stalking. The men who take my class are relieved to be given this kind of guideline.”

Carl McKay-Stratton has never taken Swack’s class, but as a bartender for more than 20 years, he’s well aware of how many variables there are when singles try to meet up.. Currently working at The Rhumb Line in Gloucester, McKay-Stratton draws from a well of firsthand observation about what works and what doesn’t.

“The biggest thing that goes wrong is that people get nervous and drink too much,” he said. Another common mistake is talking about your exes. I hear girls saying ‘My last boyfriend was this or that. ...’ Don’t do that. Focus on what you want for your future, not what’s happened in the past. Also, guys, women don’t want to hear about money and all the things you own.”

McKay-Stratton has some do’s along with his don’t’s. “Pets are a good icebreaker. Who doesn’t like hearing about a puppy or a dog?”

All of this flirting technique may sound a bit like artifice. But McKay-Stratton argued that when done right, it’s just the opposite. “Be authentic. Don’t worry about being someone you want the other person to like. Be you,” he said. “That old rule about how you shouldn’t eat on a first date? Ignore it. If you like to eat, then eat. Simply be who you are.”

Judith Swack’s first big success in her study of flirting was her own: She and her husband have been married for 29 years. But she brandishes plenty of other positive examples as well, such as Tima Maclaurin of Brookline, who took Swack’s class about eight years ago at the Boston Center for Adult Education.

“I was impressed that everything Judith taught was fact-based and scientific,” said Maclaurin, now a married mother of two. “I wanted measurable results. After the class I went out and tried some of the things she told us and they worked.”

For example, Maclaurin learned to channel Swack’s instructions about body language when she was in a social setting. “Judith teaches that there’s a way to hold your body professionally — using right angles — and a way to hold it in a flirtatious manner — using curves — and a lot of people don’t know the difference. If I found myself talking to someone I was interested in, I would check to see that I was using the proper body language to go with that feeling. And it worked.”

In fact, Maclaurin sees no reason to stop deploying Swack’s methods, even after five years of marriage.

“Now I flirt with my husband!” she said. “I use those techniques to keep our relationship alive and fresh and fun. It’s about putting yourself out there to the person with whom you want to connect, establishing that rapport so they remain interested and engaged.”



Terry Furman with his wife, Judith Swack, in their living room. (Matthew J. Lee/Globe staff)

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