

Cool in the heat of passion

By Ruth Ostrow

I REMEMBER a wonderful adage an old friend used with me all the time. "Where's the evidence?" he'd ask, after I'd given a long interpretation of some person or other.

"He is a fantastic guy. I really think this is going to work out," I'd say. "Where's the evidence?" he'd reply. "What is this guy's track record with other women? Who was he seeing before you? Why did the relationship end? Did he end it or did she? Is he kind to animals? How does he drive, is he courteous or a maniac?"

The evidence, of course, meant the tell-tale signs that most of us overlook in the heat of passion. For instance, what's the person's relationship like with their mother or father. This, my friend used to say, is really all you ever need to know to work out a mountain of potential problems ahead.

Single and dating, my friend would use his mind-over-matter technique to give himself some road map of where a new relationship was heading.

"I adore this woman. But the evidence is that she has problems with commitments. She says she wants to get married, but her longest relationship in 32 years lasted six months!

"So, while she says we make a good couple, I reckon on evidence we've probably got three months of hot sex at best. And who's complaining?"

During this intense period of dating, my friend and I would yield to our emotions and lusts, but use our brains to view the facts and give us a clear indication of where things were going.

And I remember this as being one of the most free-spirited periods of my life, because I was sailing through without false expectations or agendas. I was calling a spade a spade, really staying open to what was true, what was real, not what I imagined things could be like, and not suffering too much disappointment from romantic gobbledegook as a result.

Same with career opportunities. As a freelancer, I was able to really assess potential problems with new jobs by asking one revealing question: "Why did the last 10 people leave?"

Looking at the evidence remains a useful diagnostic tool, and I still use it today in my important relationships. It means taking people on the weight of what they've done to or for you, or to others close to them, rather than on the fancy words, promises and verbal smokescreens that pander to our hopes and dreams of "Happy Ever After".

And it's a useful device in unravelling complex issues in friendships or long-term relationships. By playing barrister, and examining the facts, we can often cut through illusions to see what's making us feel sad or powerless.

For instance, your partner keeps saying: "I really want you to have more time for yourself. I'm really committed to your personal freedom." But where's the evidence? Has he or she stopped doing some of the things they normally do, to accommodate you? How often do they take turns minding the children, or is there always an excuse?

Actions do speak louder than words. And what about partners and lovers who tell you that they would sacrifice everything for you, they love you more than life itself, only to keep neglecting you? American author Cynthia Heimel says it all in the title of her fabulous book *If You Can't Live Without Me, Why Aren't You Dead Yet?*

When a friend came to me recently and complained that the woman he was seeing had started to behave badly and in a way that was contrary to what she was saying, I simply repeated the mantra: "Look at the evidence."

"Tell me about her history. Why did her last three relationships end?" The penny suddenly dropped. "Why didn't I see it coming?" the guy lamented. Because, in matters of the heart, we see what we want to see, not what is true.

That's not to say that people we're drawn to, who have worked on themselves, can't break out of unhelpful patterns. But then this too becomes part of the evidence we need to consider: "Has this person done self-development? Are they able to take responsibility for the things that go wrong in their lives?"

One of my girlfriends is a master of fact-finding. She does research on everybody -- new female friends, cleaning staff, males. Knowledge, she says, is a powerful thing and helps her keep things in perspective.

She doesn't just collect evidence but also gets her friends to corroborate her opinion, in case she is blinded by emotions or hormones. Then she does what she wants to do anyway. "But at least I know the consequences," she says cheerfully.

And I am apt to agree. While I'm a huge fan of instincts, intuition, nature and operating free-fall without preconceived ideas -- because prejudging can often prove a self-fulfilling prophecy -- I still like the insight that comes from using the brain to give us a clearer picture of what's really going on.

The key is finding the right balance between heart and head; fancy and fact; alchemy and evidence.

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