

# Gift-giving leads to dating questions

BY ANNE REBAR  
Columnist

A group of wise men known as The Beatles once sang "Can't Buy Me Love." It seems to be an age-old piece of wisdom we pass around as something "they" always say. They always say, the grass is greener on the other side. They always say, why buy the cow when you can get the milk for free. They always say, money can't buy love.

A couple weekends ago I saw many of my friends scrambling to figure out what to buy their boyfriends for Valentine's Day. I never understood the concept of gift-giving in a relationship. It's all so stressful to endure if in fact "they" are right and money and love have no correlation.

The whole gift-giving merry-go-round goes something like this: I have to find you something you would actually like, you have to find me something I would

actually like, then we hope we spent about the same amount of money because it's awkward if someone comes in with a box of chocolate, while the other has a \$90 bottle of perfume. In the end, I basically spent money on you, you spent money on me, we are both out 40 bucks, and, in all likelihood, I could have spent that money on something I would like and use more than a giant stuffed teddy bear and some flowers that will die in a few days anyway. But that's just me.

Psychological studies on gift-giving show this practice can affect a relationship. The department of psychology at the State University of New York at Buffalo found that people are happiest in their relationships when they feel they have found someone like themselves, a "kindred spirit" who understands them and their experiences.

The gifts we receive from our

partners serve as a sort of subconscious measure of how well they know us. A good present affirms similarities and a shared bond between partners. However, a bad present choice might lead us to question whether our partner really "gets" us. Talk about pressure.

My friend ran up to me last Saturday in a fit. "Oh my gosh!" she said at about a hundred miles an hour. "He got me a present for Valentine's Day! I didn't get him anything! Is he going to be mad? Are we supposed to buy presents on Valentine's Day?" The way she ran up to me, I thought her mom had just died or something, but after I got over my mild shock I told her that yes, usually couples buy each other gifts on Valentine's Day, but no, I'm sure he probably won't mind.

Susie and Otto Collins, relationship coaches and authors, said in their blog that in a relationship, miscommunica-



tion about the exchange of gifts can lead to disappointment and hurt feelings. They suggest talking about when couples are planning on exchanging presents — all holidays, just birthdays and Christmas or not on any special occasion — and how much you plan to spend can help relieve some of the tension.

Personally, I think giving presents on special occasions is a bit overrated. Basically, you are swapping money because it's the socially correct time to do so. I mean, why not just spend some extra-special time together by going on a cool date that you wouldn't normally do, or cooking a fun, new dinner? It could be fun for both of you, and it might cost as much as buying each other pres-

ents. At least it's something you know you both will like. Pressure relieved.

When a couple doesn't give presents on all the normal occasions, the random "I saw this and thought of you" present exchanges become that much more meaningful. Of course, many people do like the idea of exchanging presents, and for those who do I recommend this: Talk to one another, decide on the amount you will spend and try to come up with something meaningful. Believe me, a toaster, however practical, will probably not induce swooning. And remember The Beatles — you can't buy love. It's not about what you spend. Some of the best presents cost almost nothing.

# MEDITATIONS OF MICHELLE: Flaws help acceptance in self

BY MICHELLE MARTIN  
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Followers of the Jain religion believe the universe is shaped like a human body. Likewise, Taoists think society at large functions the same as a single person. Thus, when you understand yourself, you can supposedly understand the workings of the entire universe.

Similarly, I've noticed I reflect my inner state of mind onto the outside world. If I love and accept who I am, other people tend to pick

up on my positive, carefree vibes and treat me more benevolently than if I despise myself. Like most others, I go through periods where I am less than happy with who I am. But I've realized this isn't healthy for me or for anyone I come into contact with. Thus, personal growth is no selfish act. When you shine with joy, you contagiously spread beams of radiance while negativity simply dissipates into the air.

Once I worked with someone who made my blood boil a little. Although he was just a server in an average restaurant, he sauntered around the place reeking of ar-

rogance. He wouldn't do anybody a favor unless it made him look good. I hardly could have a conversation with him without consciously restraining myself because his stories of womanizing offended my feminist sensibilities.

On the flip side, I know my attitude toward him was just as immature as his cockiness. Seething about the guy only made me look down on him, just like he probably looked down on me.

Someone once told me that hate only hurts yourself. So true. When

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hatred — or any negative emotion — invades, it swiftly immerses me in a little bubble of red-hot fury. I become irrational. My nemesis appears subhuman in my eyes, and I stop treating him with dignity and respect. Anger never solves a thing. Hating him never made him a more compassionate person — it only transformed me into an immature

little kid filled with an exaggerated sense of pride and entitlement. This uncontrollable anger always gripped me when I talked to him. A critical, judgmental coldness overtook any natural sense of goodwill. Intuitively, my conscience says I

should stop looking down on him. Countless religious and spiritual seekers have proven that happiness isn't becoming superior to everyone — it's letting go of your big, cumbersome ego and embracing a sense of humility.

Truly strong people don't spend all their time sabotaging others or thinking about how much other people suck because they don't need such petty compensation for their insecurities. Strength is kindness in the face of cruelty, not domination and superiority. The Dalai Lama said, "If the love within your mind is lost, and you see other beings as enemies, then no matter how much knowledge or education or material comfort you have, only suffering and confusion will ensue." Any guru or priest probably will tell you the emotional and spiritual benefits of humility and love hugely outweigh the small and selfish satisfactions of hatred. I've noticed that when I am filled with love, I physically feel expanded. I am more connected and receptive to other people, and people sense and reflect my positive energy. Suddenly, the little things don't seem so irritating. I am a lot happier when that screaming little ego isn't getting in my way.

I'd love to claim that I am one of those touchably positive souls who emits beams of radiance and loves everyone. But alas, I have a lot of work to do. And I can't just

tell myself, "Start unconditionally loving humanity, dang it!" You can't just force yourself to love, like you make yourself get out of bed to get to class in the morning. Your efforts at compassion will seem just as groggy and reluctant as your weary face. Love is a strenuous and nearly impossible task when you feel about as compassionate as a block of concrete — when you're locked in the haze of frustration, fear or defense. We've spent our entire lives programmed to look out for No. 1 and that won't change overnight. The only thing that works for me is simply watching myself without judgment. When I'm angry and critical I watch my responses. Amazingly enough, when I simply observe my actions without constant critique, my flaws don't seem to bother me as much. Then, these flaws are no longer depreciable parts of myself — they are something separate from me that I detachedly observe from a distance, like watching a lion in a zoo cage.

You see, my co-worker embodies such an enormous threat to me only because I deeply fear becoming like him: arrogant, selfish and uninteresting. This guy probably makes me mad because he represents something I dread and repress within myself. Otherwise, he wouldn't challenge me so much. Sometimes I feel selfish, which makes me so ashamed that I have spent my



entire life running in the polar opposite direction, dabbling in spirituality, activism and volunteer work the entire way. Meanwhile, he shamelessly flaunts the very things I've spent my life running from. No wonder I can't stand him. But here's the irony: When I see him as a selfish bundle of pettiness, don't I begin to engage in that very same pettiness?

Thus, when I unconditionally accept myself, flaws and all, I suddenly can tolerate my co-worker. Once I am in touch with my darker motives, they instantly loosen their iron grip on my actions. So what if he's arrogant and rude? It doesn't have to make my life any worse. And after all, he has good points I overlook when I'm seething mad. He makes conversation with me when I'm bored. He can be funny. He apologizes when he knows he has offended me.

So don't waste your good intentions by suppressing your darker side. Accept yourself simply and fully because you can't magically become someone you're not. Only when we stop giving so much power to our darkest nature can it truly disappear.



BY ANNA MEIER  
Columnist

Music streams from iPods to earbuds, Skype fires up on a computer screen, and text messages are sent and received across a cyber-sea. They do the same things we do, only they're more than 7,000 miles away in a barracks in Afghanistan.

The "War on Terror," declared by George Bush eight years ago, officially moved out of Iraq and now is concentrated on the snowy desert of Afghanistan, and the war that belonged to our parents has been ever-so-kindly handed down to yours truly. Many have termed the conflict the "Gen Y War."

When I graduated from high school, at least 20 of my classmates joined some branch of the military and almost as many joined from the graduating classes above and below

## Talking About Our Generation: Youth needs to participate in political activism

me. Of these, I personally know six who have been overseas, all but one in Iraq. The one who was sent to Afghanistan was shot and killed by Afghan soldiers during his overnight patrol. Of course, he wasn't the only one. The list of dead soldiers last year reached 520 and thousands more were wounded, according to icasualties.org.

There already are 68,000 troops stationed in Afghanistan, and when Obama's plan for a surge is implemented, this number will increase to about 150,000 troops in all, according to ABC TV's foreign correspondent, Mark Corcoran. Corcoran also posits that two-thirds of soldiers stationed in Afghanistan were still in school when this whole debacle began.

The young men and women fighting supposedly believe this is a "just war," the United States will prevail, and Obama's timetable for withdrawal will be met. But there's a distinct possibility things will

not go according to plan. Many of the soldiers being sent to Afghanistan have already fought in Iraq, but

the whole game has shifted with our increased concentration on Afghanistan. Apparently it's too dangerous of a place to even use Hummers on the road, and the military tools the streets in monster trucks called Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles, which the U.S. military spent \$32 billion rigging up, according to Corcoran.

The American government's new policy seems to be to pump as much

money and throw as many young people into the battle as possible, hoping the hodgepodge of ma-

chines and half-witted attempts at dealing with Middle Eastern people are going to solve the problem or clean up the mess we've been busy making for nearly a decade.

Many of these soldiers are on their third or fourth tours of the Middle East, now fighting the Haqqanis, who apparently are closely allied with Al Qaeda and the Taliban. The ironic and pivotal thing, though, is that they, too, believe

they are winning this war. Their leader, Sirajuddin, is more militant than the one before him, and all of these young soldiers are living day and night hoping he doesn't blow them up, hoping they can come back and settle into a relatively normal life with a family and a civilian job.

Although I obviously was not alive during the Vietnam War, I do know it was a war whose burden lay heavily on the youth of the 1960s. The difference is the college students of that decade were essential in calling the inherent flaws of the American tactics and policy to public consciousness. I fear we have left activism somewhere behind us, locked up in a drawer with our cassette tapes and VCRs. Something about large-scale activism is no longer in vogue. It's been replaced by a fashionable apathy, the force of indifference en masse.

These young soldiers' lives have been like ours up until now, and in many ways they still are. The

difference is that our cell phones and Skype conversations aren't put on hold every time someone dies until the deceased's family has been alerted. We live in the low-stress environment of a looming paper or test instead of a member of the Taliban popping out of some cave in the night to destroy your home with a handful of grenades. Yet we do little to nothing for those who are living through the Afghan winter in a tent fighting to make sure that we don't have to go to bed at night with visions of Taliban dancing in our heads.

We are all fairly intelligent people here at Truman, most of us pretty well-informed about the general state of world affairs. We refuse to use our words, though, to come up with ways to present a unified front on this side of the ocean. It's time we reciprocate a little to the thousands of Gen Y soldiers and remind them there are other people fighting for them, and that activism takes place outside the wire too.