

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

I have going out with my boyfriend for over a year and I'm finding that I'm the one planning to do things with him. I'm a planner and enjoy knowing what I'm going to do over the weekend. He says he likes to live his life spontaneously and that he's just not the planning type. I'm finding this hard to accept because he says he loves me but don't you think a guy should take the initiative to plan things with his girlfriend because she's special to him? Note that we attend the same classes together but I find this different from spending quality time with him. What can I do to encourage planning?

-- Monica

Dear Monica,

Your desire for quality time with your boyfriend is to be commended. And you're right that attending the same classes together doesn't cut it in terms of romance, intimacy, and friendship. No doubt, you will both benefit from learning about World Literature or Advanced Calculus but none of that takes the place of conversations, walking the beach together, or creating the shared memories that serve as a foundation for a long-lasting relationship.

It would help if I knew whether your boyfriend's laissez-faire attitude takes the form of benign neglect (e.g., "Uh, let's just hang out today and see if anything good comes along.") or is an alive and passionate openness to the moment (e.g., "Darling, I've just had an idea. Whadda ya say to packing a beautiful picnic lunch and driving to the mountains for a romantic weekend."). Can you see the difference between these two approaches?

As in most things in life, the middle way is the best – a combination of taking control of one's time by planning and, at the same time, being open to the fresh, new, and unexpected.

Planning allows us to make time to do the things that are important to us, but taken to an extreme, a planner may fail to capitalize on opportunities that could not be anticipated. At its worst, this attitude toward life can become almost obsessive compulsive. On the other hand, a spontaneous approach to life allows us to stay open to the moment, capturing each opportunity as it arises. At its worst, it can make us lazy and out of control with our precious free time.

A few years ago, I went to London with a friend and we had planned to see the Tower of London and the Crown Jewels that afternoon. We stopped for lunch at a little Irish pub where we met some people from County Galway – where my grandmother was from – and we started talking about Irish culture and the fine art of shooting darts. It was a wonderful and spontaneous meeting – unexpected and synchronous. My friend kept looking at her watch and giving me sharp looks as if to say, "We've GOT to go now. The Crown Jewels are waiting." I took my friend aside and asked if we could go on our planned excursion a little bit later. "After all," I said, "The Tower of London has been there for millennium and I expect it will be there if we take the 3:00 tour instead of the

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2:00.” She agreed and we had a wonderful time learning to shoot darts but we also saw the Crown Jewels.

Sit down and talk with your honey and let him know that you want to work with him to find the right balance between planning your weekends while also allowing time to take advantage of unexpected prospects. Let him know that it makes you feel special when he takes the time to come up with suggestions about how you can spend your free time together. Can you talk each week about some things that each of you would like to do? What would it be like to plan some of these activities together? Would your boyfriend be willing to take the initiative to make some of these plans happen (e.g., reserve tickets to a concert you both have agreed that you want to attend)? If he will take these steps, make sure you let him know just how much that pleases you.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2006 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.