

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

Alan works in my building and he has a crush on me. He's shy and insecure but he's also very nice and I would like to remain friendly with him. Over the last few weeks he's been persistent about sending me mushy cards and even some flowers. I've kind of hinted that I'm not interested but I just got an email from him and he has asked me out on a date (we're both single). I don't want to hurt him and feel uncomfortable with telling I really don't have any romantic feelings for him at all. Advice?

-- Brenda

Dear Brenda,

I admire your compassion for Alan and your desire to remain friendly with him in spite of the differences in your feelings for each other. However, he's not picking up on your signals that you aren't interested in dating him in spite of his romantic overtures with cards and flowers. Perhaps he is so enamored with you that he's discarded his normal emotional intelligence that would allow him to read your subtle hints. Perhaps, his shyness has caused him to be very inexperienced in how to ask for a date and – most importantly – engage in the dance of relationship where much is communicated with nonverbal signals and signs. I think that you're going to have to be very direct and, hopefully in a gentle, helpful way.

There are lots of ways to give an unwanted admirer the brush off (“Fifty Ways to Leave Your Would-Be Lover” as songwriter Paul Simon advised). Recently I heard a radio interview with some entrepreneurs who had set up a “rejection hotline” for just this purpose. Here's how it works: You give someone a phone number that you say is your own and when he calls it, he gets a message saying something like: “Obviously this person doesn't want to go out with you so she gave you this number instead of her own.” The message then goes on to offer some pretty nasty commentary as to the potential reasons as to why you're not a good catch. The organizers of this new “service” maintain that this is actually a good idea because the rejectee saves face by listening to the bad news in the privacy of his own home. Even though some of the phone messages are designed to be funny (with celebrity voices and so forth), the end result is mean-spirited. This approach might be appropriate for some creepy guy you meet in a club who is overbearing, aggressive, leans way too close, and whispers “Hey baby, what's your sign?” The rejection hotline is not, however, a desirable way to rebuff a nice guy like Alan, who you will continue to encounter in your work life.

Even though you might feel uncomfortable, you must be direct with Alan. Take a deep breath. Think about what you want to communicate to him and then be both honest and gentle. Say something positive about him (it should be true). “Alan, you are a generous and thoughtful person to send these cards and flowers. But, I do not want to go out with you. I just don't have those feelings for you.”

As difficult as it may seem to say this to him, in the long run you are respecting your own needs and feelings as well as giving him the gift of your honest, authentic self. It's better to be upfront with him rather than finding all kinds of excuses about why you can't go out this time or another. This would have a far greater rejection effect on him. Once he knows your real feelings, he should be able to move on and direct his romantic affections toward another woman who does return his amorous feelings.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2003 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) www.fullpotentialliving.com