



Masterpiece by Roy Lichtenstein, 1962

POW! THE ART OF FLIRTING

Lifelong failed flirter Marianne Power leaves her comfort zone far behind at flirt school, and discovers the fun to be had when you lighten up

There's a cartoon doing the rounds on Facebook; it's about flirting. In one picture, titled 'How people flirt', there's a girl batting her eyelashes, with the caption: 'Hey, hot stuff...' In the next box, entitled 'How I flirt', there's a picture of a terrified-looking girl talking to a guy and saying, 'So, do you like cheese?'

I am the cheese girl. As an ex-convent-schoolgirl, the art of flirting has totally passed me by. Faced with someone I like, I freeze and either say something stupid or run away.

But I'm fed up of being so uptight – which is why I am enrolling in Cate Mackenzie's flirting workshop. A 'love coach' and psychosexual therapist, she doesn't just teach people looking for love; she believes we can all use flirting to change the way we connect with the world.

'It's about making the most of every interaction – whether that's in the Post Office or with an attractive man,' she says. 'It can help our work relationships, friendships, and change the way we feel about ourselves. It's amazing what will come your way when you take time to connect with the people around you.'

Just to prove the point our waiter brings a pot of tea. We have met in a members club in London and the staff clearly adore Mackenzie. 'I've given you some extra biscuits, Cate,' he says. 'John, you're such a gentleman, thank you so much...' she replies, with a smile. It's not fake, just utterly magnetic. She exudes warmth. So how does she do it?

According to Mackenzie, the first step to being a good flirt is to lighten up. 'Flirting is the opposite of being >>

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serious; it's playful. You have to let go of the expectation it will lead to something,' she says. 'Just flirt for the joy of communicating with people.' That's why flirting can be hard for single people, such as me – we think too much, we want too much for it to lead somewhere, or worry it won't.

'When you're out of practice, everything becomes meaningful and heavy,' says Mackenzie. The antidote, she says, is to stop looking for The One and start looking for fun. 'When we're having fun we feel more alive and connected to the world. When we are serious, we shut off.'

She revolutionised her own life, it turns out, by deciding to pursue fun, rather than romance. A few years ago, she took a month off to go to three music festivals, striking up conversations with everyone she met. On the final day she invited a stranger to dance with her. She is marrying him next week. 'We met because I wasn't serious; I asked him if he wanted to join me but it didn't matter if he said yes or no. I was having fun anyway. There was no pressure.'

Once you've lightened up, you need to tap into your 'sexual powers'. I don't think I have any but Mackenzie assures me I do. 'Repeat after me: "I am ir-res-ist-ible"', she says. I feel like an idiot. In my head I am saying, 'You're not irresistible, you're fat and your hair is crazy...' Mackenzie tells me it doesn't matter if I don't believe it – just pretend. 'Men respond to confidence and openness. It's not the best-looking women who get the guys, it's the ones who give off signals.'

She's right – I have a friend who leaves men in a quivering heap wherever she goes. She's not a skinny blonde and doesn't simper, but she's happy in her own skin. As Mackenzie is.

'Now say it like Mae West. Watch on YouTube the way she talks and moves – even in her eighties she flirted with everyone. 93% of communication is body language and the tone of your voice – only 7% is what you actually say.'

I don't know what Mae West sounds like but I do as close to a Marilyn Monroe voice as I can. I feel self-conscious but by the third time, it's thrilling to act in a way opposite to how I usually do. I feel womanly and sexual – not something I experience in my restrained existence.

Mackenzie says every morning you should enter a 'goddess space' – spending five minutes dancing, telling yourself you are irresistible – to boost your confidence. Then, look the world in the eye. Flirting means being receptive to people – and that starts with eye contact, so Mackenzie tells me to practise holding people's gaze.

A guy is walking across the room and I try my gaze on him. I worry I'll have 'I'm desperate' stamped on my head. 'You are not smiling with the expectation of getting something back, you are doing it as an act of generosity,' says Mackenzie. And if I'm close to the person, she encourages me to follow up the smile with a compliment.

Yes, but what if they don't smile back? 'If they don't smile back, it's not necessarily a rejection; they might just be having a bad day or are slow to respond.'

As it is, I look and smile and Mr Handsome smiles back. I feel a shot of electricity. Funny how such a tiny thing as looking and smiling feels so bold and thrilling. He goes back to his table, where he joins a very pretty girl. Oh well.

Mackenzie explains how the same techniques can be used at work. 'Flirting in the office is not about being seductive – it's about being friendly. Compliment your colleagues and smile at them, genuinely,' says Mackenzie. 'Most successful people have a way of making others feel like they're the most important person in the room. Do the same with friends – say how lovely it is to be with them.'

Mackenzie is the kind of person who flirts with everyone she meets. 'Ask everybody how they are and when possible use their names. On a recent shopping trip, I got chatting to the girl who was helping me and invited her to my courses. I left with a discount. That wasn't why I chatted to her, but it was a happy result. It's nice to be nice.'

Indeed. I think our insecurities stop us from interacting with people – it takes a lot of confidence to be the one who smiles first but I'm determined to keep trying. I leave Mackenzie and get the bus home. It's crowded, and usually

I would never look up at people, but this time I do.

I smile and try to keep eye contact. I sit next to an old man, and smile at him. He smiles back. I tell him I like his glasses; he tells me his daughter bought them for him and we have a chat. I guess it wasn't flirting – but at least it was chatting.

My friend rings and instead of just saying 'Hi', I say, 'It's so lovely to hear from you...' I can hear her confusion (she's not used to such enthusiasm).

Our conversation is more upbeat than usual.

The next day I go to Whole Foods and ask a guy at the till where to find yoghurt. He points me to the back of the shop. Instead of scampering away I give him a mega smile and a sincere thank you. I look right into his eyes and he looks back. It's weirdly electric. 'Is there anything else you'd like?' he asks. 'What are you offering?' I reply. I can't believe I said it! I would never usually say something like this! We begin chatting and I realise I am flirting – really flirting. He is flirting back. He asks me if I'd be interested in their 3-for-2 bath-oil offer and I say I might be... he suggests before I buy I might like some free testers. I leave with a bagful! I feel like Marilyn Monroe.

Flirting with the world is fun. There's no agenda – it's just a way of going about your day and smiling instead of frowning. And Mackenzie is right: I suspect it could open more doors than I expected. There's only one thing I didn't get – a boyfriend. This morning I walked to the newsagent and saw a handsome man, and even though my instinct was to look away, I looked right at him and smiled. He smiled too. We looked at each other for what felt like a long time – but was probably only a couple of seconds. Then he looked away. Strangely I didn't take it as rejection. I just figured he probably needs to spend a bit of time with a flirting coach. ■



'Even in her
EIGHTIES Mae
West FLIRTED
with everyone'

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