

How you can be

The most meaningful relationship in your life won't just 'happen'. A new book argues that you have to work to find lasting love

Report KATE BUSSMANN



When Robbie Williams and Ayda Field got married in August, one of the world's most famous commitment-phobes took himself off the market, declaring he'd finally found a woman who lived up to the title of his 1999 song 'She's The One'. 'She makes me want to be a better person,' he told *Hello!* magazine, 'and in the process I have become a better person.'

Then there's Russell Brand. The self-described former sex addict announced in January that he'd proposed to singer Katy Perry after a four-month relationship. Falling in love with her, he said, 'was the most visceral, organic, natural thing that's ever happened to me'. A mere two months later, Simon Cowell, another dyed-in-the-wool marriage dodger, confirmed his engagement to make-up artist Meaghan Hussainy. 'You just know when you've found somebody special,' he gushed, totally out of character. 'I'm smitten. I think she's The One.'

Even Jerry Hall, who never quite seemed to have fully moved on in the decade since she split from Mick Jagger, believes she's found what she's been looking for — in farming consultant Philip Ferguson. 'This guy is perfect in every way,' she insists. 'I suppose I hadn't met The One until now.'

The idea that our one true love is somewhere out there has persisted since classical times: in

Greek mythology, Zeus split human beings in two to weaken us, cursing us to spend our lives searching for our missing 'other halves'. However, a new book claims that we're thinking about all this in entirely the wrong way. In *How to Be The One*, author Roy Sheppard argues that not only do we all have lots of potential Ones (so there's nothing mystical about meeting our soul mate) but also in order to find that person, we first need to make sure that we are One material ourselves.

According to Sheppard, it's only through hard-won self-awareness of our best and worst sides, combined with a rigorous emotional 'work-out', that we can know what we should be looking for. In other words, until you're comfortable with who you are, you could be looking for the wrong One — and may miss the right One in the meantime.

All those love-struck stars might just prove Sheppard's theory. After all, Williams, Brand and Hall have spent time in therapy, while even the seemingly bulletproof Cowell has entertained the idea of seeing a psychiatrist to address the darker side of his personality. Russell Brand and Katy Perry may turn out to be the exception, though. 'They're perhaps confusing short-term intensity and passion for genuine long-lasting love,' says Sheppard. 'It could be a "me plus me" relationship, without much room for an "us".'

A former BBC reporter turned professional speaker, Sheppard sees strong parallels between

relationships in business and in a personal context: 'A lot of people think of the corporate world as glass and steel. It's not — it's about people.' We are encouraged to improve our skills through training and mentoring, and when writing a CV we have to sum up our appeal to an employer — so why not think of dating the same way?

After all, we don't expect to land a dream job without proving (and improving) ourselves professionally; and yet, as Sheppard points out, many of us expect a meaningful relationship to just 'happen'. 'I know so many people who expect a partner to make them happy, but you need to accept that you have an equal role in this. It's about being a better person for yourself first, and then for the most meaningful person you could meet in the future. And if you don't know yourself — and actually like yourself — you'll choose a partner you think will fill what's missing inside you.'

Emily Leopold, a 35-year-old teacher from London, is a case in point. Within two weeks of meeting her husband, she was telling friends that he was The One. 'He felt like an old friend — we just got each other completely,' she says. They married two years later and now have a baby. She believes that the fact she knew herself better by the time they met was a key reason that it worked out. 'By my late 20s I had accepted who I was, warts and all. Accepting the bad aspects of my personality and learning to live with them, laugh



at them and be upfront about them in a relationship is important too. I don't think he was the only One by any means. But if I had met the man of my dreams at 20, he probably wouldn't have been The One. I didn't know the real me then.'

So how do you go about becoming The One yourself? In *How to Be The One*, Sheppard sets out a two-stage process. The first is what he calls Project You, where you fill out a series of charts (free to download from betheonebook.com) describing

your perfect partner's characteristics and values on a scale of one to ten. You then go back and fill them out again, this time rating yourself on those same attributes. 'It's about looking at the personal qualities you think are important, and saying, well, if that's important to me in someone else, how do I rate on those scales myself?

'It's not about changing yourself,' adds Sheppard. 'It's to make sure you are clear about what you bring to a relationship and demonstrate the values you hold so dear. That way, you are much more likely to connect deeply with someone else who also rates those qualities.'

For an added layer of self-reflection, he advises you to ask your friends to rate you from their perspective. That sounds terrifying, but Sheppard insists it's well worth it. 'Feedback from friends who know you well and who genuinely care can be incredibly helpful,' he says. 'People have told me it was the most fascinating conversation they'd ever had, because the perceptions that other people have of you can be very different from your own. If you go through life not knowing how others perceive you, you'll go from one relationship to another, repeating the same mistakes.'

Above all, Sheppard says you must not argue with the feedback they give, or become defensive – it will only lead your friends not to be honest with you in future. Looking at the points of difference between their assessment of you and your own will allow you to identify the areas where you are not



The love of their life? Jerry Hall with Philip Ferguson, Robbie Williams with wife Ayda Field, and Russell Brand with fiancée Katy Perry

coming across in the way that you'd like, and to work on improving them.

Stage two focuses on strengthening what Sheppard calls your Emotional Core. This entails cultivating healthy self-esteem, a positive attitude, happiness and kindness with compassion. To do this he offers hundreds of what he calls Stop/Start Reminders to be used as mantras, such as 'stop comparing yourself with anyone else' and 'start accepting invitations – just say "yes", then go'.

You choose the ones that resonate for you, then repeat them daily until they become reality (a method called Ericksonian therapy, a precursor to neurolinguistic programming, which claims that you can positively influence your own thoughts and feelings by repeating affirmations). Sheppard's personal reminders include 'I remember to be happy' and 'I focus on what's working'.

Rachel Garner, 26, a mature student from

'If you don't know and like yourself, you'll choose a partner you think will fill what's missing inside'

Bristol, tested Sheppard's method and learned some hard truths. 'It made me realise I was expecting things I wasn't willing to give,' she says. 'I wanted someone who was completely honest and transparent, but I wasn't willing to be that for them.'

'I got married at 19 and went through a horrific divorce, and I've always tried to hide that. I've recently met someone, and decided to be completely open with him. I told him everything, and it was very positive. I've always been focused on not letting myself get hurt, but you

need to move on. If I'm honest, I thought the Stop/Start Reminders were quite cheesy at first. But there are some I keep going back to, "stop mistreating yourself by being critical and judgmental", for example. I've got a better attitude now towards myself and relationships.'

Becoming The One can be a tough journey, as it has the potential to reveal uncomfortable truths and demand changes in the way we relate to ourselves and others, but an open mind is key. 'You would be amazed at how many people just can't or won't think outside their way of doing things,' Sheppard writes in his book. 'They really would prefer to be right than to be happy.'

As for those who have been lucky enough to have already found The One, they can't relax just yet. 'The biggest misconception is that once you've ticked the box and got your relationship underway, your work is done,' says Sheppard. 'You need to treat your partner better than you would your best friend. Successful relationships are like marathons – they require effort, training and commitment. If you're too busy for that, don't be surprised if over time your relationship gets frittered away. Falling in love is passive. Being in love is not.'

This may not sound romantic, but if he's correct, then the fate of our love lives is firmly in our own hands. **V**

*How to Be The One by Roy Sheppard is published by Centre, price £9.99**

