

eHarmony: Be Careful What You Wish For

We've all seen them: Those commercials with the happy eHarmony couples, swaying to the sounds of Natalie Cole. The grandfatherly Neil Clark Warren, telling us to sign up for a free compatibility profile. The promise of sunshine and roses, with ne'er a fight, or even mild disagreement.

Well, that's marketing for you. I ought to know, as I was an off-and-on customer of eHarmony for four years. So, I believe I am well qualified to give an accurate picture of the services offered, along with their various benefits and flaws. I know them all too well. The record of this experience follows below.

I signed for eHarmony the summer after I finished college. Yes, during the time that most people meet the person they will spend the rest of their lives with, I was doing other things. Those other things included working, and being far too picky. Maybe picky isn't the right word, although I believe that "oblivious" fits the bill nicely. Other guys would tell me, "That girl is into you, man.", and I would cringe a little and keep walking. She could have been, but I was clued into a universal truth at an early age: All guys think all girls are into them. Therefore, buying into this mass delusion would bring me great pain, when I found that girl was "...way into somebody else, man". This self-preservation instinct probably kept me away from a few great, and a few painful relationships.

Enough about me, for now. This article is all about me, so I am sort of unavoidable. The first thing that eHarmony claims works for them is this profile. They ask all these questions, and some of them seem to have little relevance whatsoever. It's more in-depth than your traditional personality profile, and it takes a long while. If the "love of my life" hadn't been waiting on the other end of that test, I would have given up in frustration. I forged onward. It is also unadjustable. How well do you really know how funny you are. Seriously. You might feel inferior; you could be overconfident. Anything could skew these answers in the wrong direction. You might have even overeaten. They are based on self-perception, and on the way you are feeling during the test.

After that, I waited. They said it would possibly take awhile to find someone to match my profile. They weren't kidding. This was in the early days of eHarmony, and there was quite a bit of skepticism where online dating was concerned. It took what seemed like forever for me to get my first match. Now, they say to communicate with every single match you get. So I did. To me this is the best and worst part of eHarmony as a service.

The questions they have you ask to each other as icebreakers create anticipation: How fast will they answer, will they answer at all, why haven't they answered yet?

Every time you communicate, it creates this Pavlovian anxiety, combined with an equal feeling of relief and joy when you finally receive the response. This, my friends is the best part of the eHarmony experience. Remember, eHarmony controls all aspects of the communication during this time. This is also the worst part of the eHarmony experience, as it has the tendency to create a false sense of intimacy.

Why? Well, more than a few studies have shown that people are far more willing to open up when protected by a keyboard and a monitor. Don't be disappointed if that highly eloquent and witty person who wrote you an email is almost painfully shy in person. This happened to me with the first match I completed communication with.

Joy(*not her real name, of course) was a student at one of the local colleges nearby. She was hilarious over email, and quite verbose. It was not unusual for her emails to occupy 2-3 pages on a single-spaced screen.

After we exchanged our real email addresses, we decided to call and talk a bit. Now, I am not a huge fan of the phone. Something about holding your arm to your ear for over 5 minutes feels unnatural. I assumed from the silence on the other end that I had said or done something wrong. This was not the case. When we decided to finally meet in person, she was as quiet, if not quieter than she was when on the phone. While we shared sort of familiar family backgrounds, we had virtually nothing else in common. I gave it a few more dates before I gently said that things were not going to work romantically.

Then came Marta*. Marta was lovely, an ex-model, musically talented, and was a transplant from the Mid-West. Everything was incredible, except for the fact that she had no sense of humor. I take that back, she did laugh hysterically when she said things like "pee" and "poo", and about situations where you almost did such things in your pants. These would put her in fits of almost paralyzing laughter. She was also a vegetarian, not because she hated meat, but because she thought it was healthy to eat in such a manner. As an extreme omnivore, and halfway decent chef, I found this highly offensive. I still dated her for awhile, just to give things a chance. Eventually, our conversations became shorter, and we stopped talking altogether. Evidently, the decision to stop dating was mutual. I'm sorry, if you don't feel Will Farrell's "Cowbell" skit is funny, there is no way that you have a properly adjusted sense of humor. In fact, it should probably be added as a question on eHarmony's little test. It sure wouldn't hurt anything. Once

again, this person was still nothing like me. While it would be nice if you grew up in a stable home, I don't get to live there after we get married. Some things are just not that important.

After encountering two women in a row who didn't quite get it, (there were plenty of others, whose I never chose to meet, based on their answers to the questions posed), I decided that the test must be the problem. So I wrote eHarmony's customer support. I told them that, based on the matches I was receiving, I must have botched a question or so, in a category or two. They offered to tweak those categories for me, and I allowed them to do so. This was preferable to taking the test over again.

They changed those settings. I wish I had never made that request. The matches that I received from that point on were horrible. The problem? Many of them did not have a basic grasp of the English language. We're not talking too many commas, or improper use of semicolon. This was full-on manslaughter. After a few months of this, I stopped paying their enormous fees, and let the membership lapse.

While I am building up to my final experience with eHarmony, let's talk about the fee structure. While that "compatibility profile" may be free, the service certainly is not. Their by-the-month fee is still \$59.95 a month. While they discount a full year to \$21 a month, you still are required to make a lump sum payment of over \$250 to lock in that rate. Ouch! That certainly made an impact on my wallet as a single guy. That's where eHarmony gets you as well: They attach a price to something that you respond emotionally to. This ensures that you will allow your account to continue to be debited, month-after-month-after-month. Mr. or Mrs. Right could be just around the corner. Do you really want to take a chance that you will miss an opportunity that could change your life forever?

Back to the story. I had my final encounter with eHarmony nearly a year and a half later. The algorithm had to have improved by now, and with all that advertising, the dating pool should be better as well. It happened to be. Two days later, I met a girl who was exactly like me. She had a child, and was divorced, but was exactly like me. She was pretty, shared the same faith, and the same values. She even enjoyed the same music. Most importantly, she had a sense of humor. We met. The attraction was instant, there were warm fuzzies and long walks. There were romantic meals at nice restaurants, and makeout sessions that lasted for hours. There were quiet times where we'd just gaze into each other's eyes. It was everything a romantic could hope for, and more. Caitlin* was also ready for marriage, as was I. 2 months in, there was already talk of an engagement, of how we would live, where we would live, and if I would adopt her child. As the relationship went on, I started to notice something: I didn't like where I was in my life. She was a mirror image of me, a snapshot of exactly the person I had become. Her ethical standards and lack of commitment to her faith was a reflection of mine, as was her overly strong desire to be married. It was desperation and immaturity on the part of both parties, pure and simple. Slowly, I had changed as a person, and I knew that I couldn't marry who I was at that time. On the day that I chose to break up with her, I went to see a 007 film. My stomach was in knots throughout the movie.

That night, after I broke the news and consoled her for 3 hours, I got in my truck to leave. I thought about what things would have been like if I never met her. I thought I would never pay for another month of eHarmony again. It had finally worked, but I wasn't satisfied with the results.

Plenty of money has been made on eHarmony. They have convinced the world that you must share the same things in common. They say you must just "click" on all levels, and that that your level of "clickiness" is determined by your personality. The truth is, you need to be in agreement, not identical twins. Agreement comes about when two people with differences make the choice to sacrifice their singular viewpoint for a common vision. That is what makes a marriage strong. I know, because I am now married to a woman I met offline. She and I are very different, with contrasting parents, economic, and social factors. We are the very opposite of each other in almost every single way. One is weak, where the other is strong. If we disagree, then we are forced to grow. After all, marriage is about growth, in every aspect of our lives. Marriage is designed to mature us, and give a sense of oneness, not sameness. That is what we are all seeking.

So be careful what you wish for, all ye who pay eHarmony dues. You might get exactly what you bargained for.

About the Author

Rob Charles is now happily married and free of eHarmony. He works as an analyst for a company that sells [otr tires](#). He hopes to take his second honeymoon in Canada, and probably could have paid for the airfare if he hadn't paid all those subscriber fees. Oh, well.

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