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## Getting Married: The Strategic Approach

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### **Okay, you're not a box of detergent, but you feel you've been left on the shelf. Michelle Burford meets a marriage consultant with a Harvard MBA and a 15-Step program aimed at altar-ing your life!**

All singles in search of a whine-fest should roll right on past this train stop: anyone who gets off at Rachel Greenwald's station will be served a particularly strong shot of truth. Her forthcoming book, *Find a Husband After 35 Using What I Learned at Harvard Business School*, makes zero allowances for always-the-bridesmaid-brooding. But for the woman who's ready to vault to the altar, Rachel has a promise: Put yourself on a 15-Step plan she calls "The Program," and you'll have one foot in that Vera Wang gown.

Five years ago, Rachel launched her consulting business, Findahusbandafter35.com, in Denver and began teaching clients the same principles she used in packaging products such as Evian Water (she once served as that company's Marketing Manager) and Carolee Jewelry. "I'm treating singleness as a marketing issue," says Rachel, who calls her program a "strategic plan" in which the woman is the "product" to be advertised. "My program is for the woman who is sick of wallowing in **why** she is still single. The point is that she is—and what will she do about it? What I'm offering her is an objective business perspective."

But doesn't it seem a tad contrived to market a human being? "If you were looking for a job, you could call it 'contrived' to put your resume online, ask friends for leads, and buy a new interview suit," she writes. "But you'd do it—because you'd be more likely to find a job...why is it different in trying to find a husband?"

This from a wife (and now mother of three) who met her husband 11 years ago using her own Step #12- "Event Marketing: Throw a Program Party!" which means creating a "strategic networking event" to showcase yourself. "I felt so fortunate to have found my husband and to be so happy, I wanted my single friends to have the same experience," Rachel writes.

As her company succeeded, word spread. She then took her act on the road with seminars (topic: "Marriage 911") and now claims that while a husband is not a panacea, she can tell you how to find a good one faster than you can spell *Tiffany-Princess-Cut-Diamond*.

The day I catch up with Rachel at Manhattan's Harvard Club, I've come to see whether she can convince me, the former chubby chick with the Afro, that her techniques will work. I sashay in wearing a fire-engine-red dress (in her chapter titled "Packaging: Create Your Best Look" she suggests ditching all that black for a color that will differentiate me

from the 32 million other single women my age – 30 and older). Perhaps because she’s already married, she can justify her black suit, Jackie O chic as it is. Our quick phoner the previous day—we were two strong gusts of energy spinning toward each other — immediately becomes, upon meeting, a whirlwind exchange of chatter and laughter that draws glances from a few blue bloods around us. Rachel, who enunciates with English-teacher perfection, oozes intensity with every gesture she uses to punctuate her rapid-fire statements. She whisks me to an empty sitting room, seldom shifts her gaze from me, as she listens to my dating history, then insists, as the pitch of her voice climbs, that The Program can rescue me. “When you sign up 100% for anything—whether it’s losing weight, finding a job, or quitting an addiction, I have no doubt that it becomes a challenge you can rise above,” she tells me. “I’ve seen what the power of focus can do for a woman who’s committed not just in words, but in action.”

Me, too—which is why Rachel is my kind of gutsy girl: all the kick of Cheddar on rye minus any trace of baloney. As in this bit of bluntness she delivers in her chapter Telemarketing: Bring out your Rolodex: “Let me tell you right up front you’re *not* gonna like this step!” she writes. “But trust me, it can yield very good results... you are going to call everyone you know and directly ask them to fix you up.” That means all human life forms currently listed in your Palm V – landlords, lawyers, grannies, hairstylists, florists, stockbrokers, long-lost gal pals from summer camp, former colleagues, and even old boyfriends you’re still on good terms with.

Oh, exhale: this approach need not make you seem desperate. “Each person will probably think you’re calling two or three friends, not two or three *hundred*,” Rachel says. She estimates, based on her experience with clients and her business school training that you’ll score one blind date for every ten calls. “Why go through this torture?” she writes. “This statistic says it all: ‘50% of people now married or living together were introduced by good friends or family members.’”

After pouring over the 15 steps, everything from “Make the Program your #1 Priority” to “Pump up the Volume” (“my approach gives you the tools to attract the highest number of men quickly and efficiently”)—I decide to test drive creating a “personal brand.” “This is what sets you apart from your competitors—and to be effective, it must be memorable and specific,” she explains. “Madonna’s brand might be ‘outrageous, sexual, pop singer.’ We’re all multi-faceted, so you need to give your friends who’ll set you up on blind dates, a short-hand way of summing you up.” This, she says, derives from the business principle that a well-defined brand is essential to the success of any product, be it Jo Malone fragrance, the U.S. Mail, or you. Not only should your brand ring true to your ‘customers’—the people you’ll ask to scare up dates for you, or the countless men with whom you’ll click Cosmo glasses with—it should also be designed to attract the kind of partner you’re looking for.

Rachel has me draw up a megalist of my most appealing attributes, like “resilient” and “playfulness.” Then I choose three (“Writer,” “Warm Smile,” and “Grew up in Phoenix”) as a basis for a brand—“SunnyGirl from Arizona.” On the two web sites where I posted a profile, I update my photo (in the old one, we agree, the bad lighting doesn’t exactly say

“Sunny Girl”). I then begin “advertising” by calling every girlfriend I have and asking for a set up. This move alone nets me three dates.

For those who snatch up Rachel’s book, I suggest enlisting the help of a supporter (in Step #2 she suggests you find a Program Mentor, preferably someone married) who won’t be any less shy than Rachel about delivering the hard news straight. (After seeing my potential online photo in which I’m sitting on a *bed*, she asks, “Do you want a husband or a one-night stand?”). In this program, the truth is the essential bottom layer upon which your entire five-tiered wedding cake will stand.

Within two weeks of trying Rachel’s strategies, I, the girl who once spent Friday nights booting up Tivo for an *American Idol* marathon, am now juggling so many suitors that I started a ‘man-agement’ diary. One of my dates has even led to a second, a third, and a fourth. What a difference a brand—and perhaps 12 to 18 months— can make.