

Finding the perfect partner can cost you dear... up to £30,000 if you want this dating agency founder

What I've learned about money (and love) in 36 years of matchmaking wealthy people

KAREN Mooney launched Sara Eden, an exclusive dating agency, in 1988 and has matched many thousands of wealthy clients and seen thousands of weddings (and children) as a result. Here, Karen, 63, who is divorced and lives in Surrey with her 26-year-old son, Cameron, tells us what she has learned about money and love from 36 years in the dating game.

MONEY is a very important part of every relationship and these days you need to be pretty canny when it comes to love.

I may deal with relationships and romance for a living but I deliberately keep my own personal life private and very separate from my business.

A lot of the wealthy people who join Sara Eden want to date other people who are financially secure. They want to be sure that each person is bringing something to the table and to know the person they are dating is not lying about themselves – or their finances.

If you are wealthy and single – especially if you are a widow or widower – you are a target for a scammer. And if you've had a really happy marriage and your partner was wonderful, then you can be a little bit naive and trusting, too. You might also feel lonely and that can make you vulnerable.

We had a 60-year-old widow phone up who said she wanted to join Sara Eden because she'd had a horrible experience

‘When a man has less money than his partner he can feel threatened’

with an American man she met through an online agency.

The man had told her how wonderful she was and then, after he gained her trust, he started to WhatsApp her – so she had no protection from the agency. He told her he lived abroad and wanted to meet her in the UK, but he needed money to come here, because he had a sick daughter. She sent him the money, and never heard from him again. It turned out his profile was fake. He had used somebody else's photograph and she lost all the money she had sent him. In total, it was about £20,000.

Another client – a self-made man – had met his ex-wife when they were very young. He went on to become very successful, while she stayed at home and was a housewife. There's nothing wrong with that, of course.

But she started going to the gym and ended up having an affair, which broke his heart. And then he lost a lot of money in the divorce. So he decided he wanted to meet a woman who was financially compatible with him – and that's why he came to us.

We matched him with a beautiful lady who was very financially secure, and they are now in a relationship, planning their future together.

Money can put a big strain on relationships. Sometimes when a man has less money than his partner, he can feel financially threatened and behave accordingly. One

of our female members had been married a long time to a very proud man, whose business fell into trouble. Because he was so proud, he kept everything secret and put his head in the sand.

In the end, she found out – because you can't keep things like that a secret for ever. She realised he was losing his business, and all their money with it.

Eventually they split up. It caused them both a lot of trauma and was very sad because if he had confided in his wife, she could have helped him financially.

But he didn't want to do that, as he was too scared of losing face.

I started Sara Eden when I was 28. At the time, I was working for Buckingham Palace as head of their civilian staff. I hurt my shoulder, took some time off work and came up with the idea for the business, because my girlfriends,

who were busy, professional career women, kept coming to me and saying they couldn't meet the right sort of men. Sara means 'royal princess' and Eden means 'garden of love'.

I set up the business on a shoe-

‘There are telltale signs for spotting gold diggers’

string from my kitchen table. It was a big step for me to leave the palace, because I had a lovely job. My first clients were friends and I also went to wine bars and handed out business cards.

When I met one of my founding members recently, I asked him

why he had given me £230 – which was a lot of money in those days. I had interviewed him in my own home and my business had clearly only just been set up. And he said he did it because he believed in me. I now employ seven people and the business is highly profitable, with a lot of room for growth.

We know the sort of person who comes to us is financially secure as we charge £6,500 a year, including VAT, which works out at about £450 a month. That reassures our clients and they know that everyone they will be matched with has been able to afford to pay that price, and also that everyone who joins our agency is committed to finding a relationship.

In return for their membership fee, we put a lot of time and effort into finding matches for our clients – interviewing them, vetting them (everyone has to

FACE TO FACE: Karen Mooney has a 95 per cent success rate

supply three forms of ID, typically their driving licence, passport and a utility bill).

We meet all clients several times a year face-to-face in our London or Windsor office and generally get to know them. We ask them lots of searching questions, often about their life, their previous relationships and how they see themselves in the future.

That allows us to spot gold diggers. There are tell-tale signs such as wanting possessions that are completely out of their financial reach, like a holiday home abroad and lots of luxury holidays.

Each member we try to match is just an individual we've met, not just a face on a profile.

If you want me personally to find you someone, it costs £30,000 including VAT per year. I have a 95 per cent success rate but I don't take on many clients. I want to make sure I have enough time to devote to each of them. I choose clients according to whether I think I can work with them.

They don't get a guarantee, but all the clients who I have worked with recently have been matched.

In 2018, we had our 30th anniversary celebrations and invited some of the couples I have successfully matched over the years to a party. One of these clients said his adult son was struggling to meet the right woman. So we then matched his son to a lovely lady.

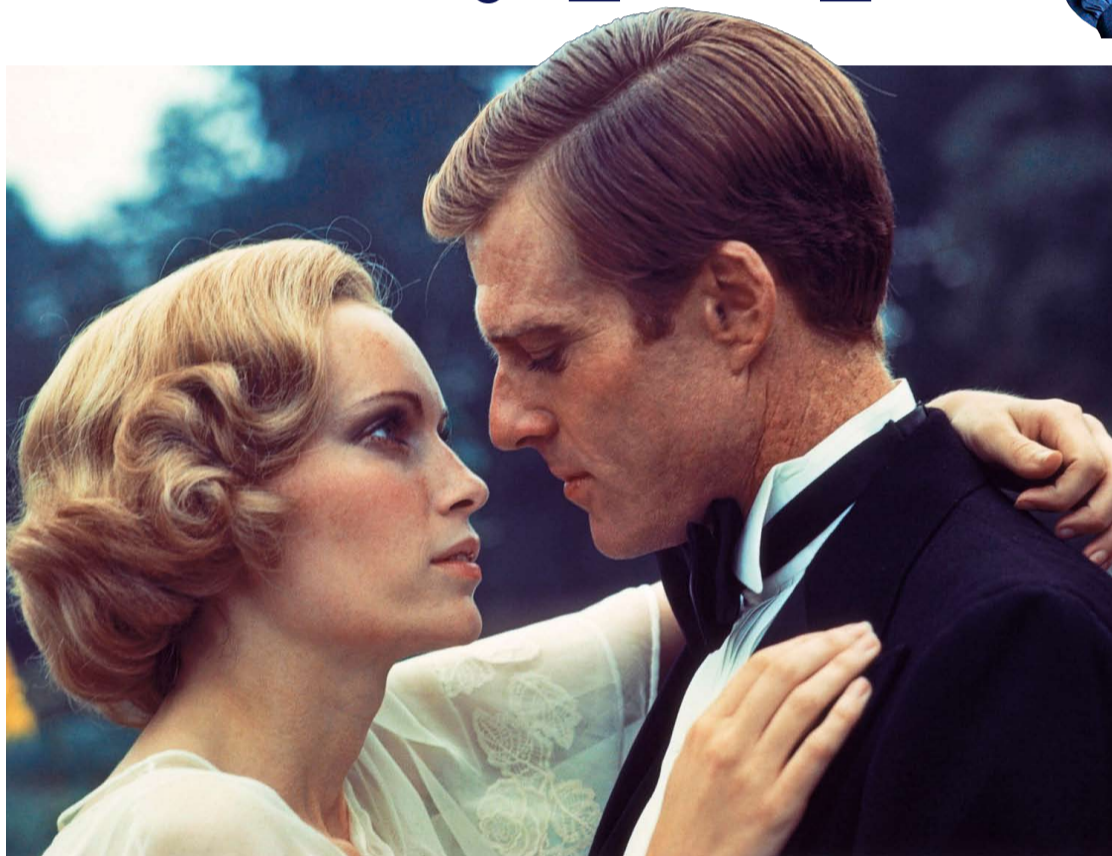
They are married now and have a beautiful little girl. That is one of my favourite stories because it is an intergenerational success.

In my experience, class differences are less important than age differences.

Money has always been important to my clients – but love is the most important thing of all.

Finding someone you love, someone you're happy with, can sit in silence with, can laugh and cry with: that is what is most important to them – and to us.

● As told to Donna Ferguson



A GAME OF LOVE: Mia Farrow and Robert Redford star in the 1974 adaptation of *The Great Gatsby*

