

BETTER DECISIONS ♥ HEALTHIER RELATIONSHIPS ♥ A BRIGHTER FUTURE

DATING *For*♥ MARRIAGE

— The Dating Investment Ladder™ —

How to Identify and Attract a Mature,
Successful and God-Fearing Man Who
Is Ready to Settle Down.



Understand
What You Want



Spot True
Intentions



Protect Your
Emotional Investment



Make Better
Relationship Choices

DATING FOR MARRIAGE



— MIKKY OLATINKA



MIKKY OLAYINKA

— LIFESTYLE & RELATIONSHIP COACH —

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Introduction

Dating Shouldn't Feel Like Guesswork

Dating can be exciting.

But it can also leave you wondering:

Does this person actually want a relationship?

Am I ignoring a red flag?

Should I give this connection more time?

Am I asking for too much?

When you don't have clarity, dating can quickly become a cycle of guessing, overthinking, hoping, and second-guessing yourself.

It doesn't have to be that way.

Intentional Doesn't Mean Desperate

Wanting a relationship that has direction doesn't make you desperate.

The difference is how you pursue it.

Desperation says, *"I hope this person chooses me."*

Intentional dating says, "Let's see if we're actually right for each other."

That small shift changes everything.

You stop trying to convince someone to want you and start paying attention to whether their values, character, lifestyle, and relationship goals align with yours.

The Cost of Dating Without Direction

Without a clear approach, it's easy to become attached before you have enough information.

You may overlook inconsistencies because you like someone.

Stay too long because you've already invested time.

Mistake attention for genuine interest.

Or keep choosing the same type of person and wondering why the same problems keep happening.

The problem isn't that you care too much. You may simply need a better process.

Attraction Is Only the Beginning

Chemistry matters.

But chemistry isn't compatibility.

You can have intense attraction to someone who is emotionally unavailable. You can have amazing conversations with someone whose values don't align with yours. You can feel your heart fluttering and still be heading toward a relationship that won't work.

Healthy dating requires you to look beyond how someone makes you feel and pay attention to who they are.

How to Use This Guide:

This guide will help you date with more intention and less anxiety.

You'll learn how to:

- Get clear about what you actually want.
- Recognize genuine compatibility.
- Spot red flags without becoming cynical.
- Have important conversations earlier.
- Pace emotional investment.
- Make better decisions when feelings get involved.

You don't need to become cold, suspicious, or overly analytical.

You simply need to become more intentional about who you choose and why.

Because the goal isn't to find someone who simply wants you.

It's to find someone who is right for you — and to become confident enough to recognize the difference.

Chapter 1

You're Not Asking for Too Much. You May Just Be Investing Too Soon.

There is a particular kind of dating frustration that can leave you questioning yourself.

You meet someone you genuinely like. The conversations are easy. There is attraction. He seems interested. You start looking forward to his messages. You begin imagining what this could become.

And before you know it, you are emotionally involved.

But there is one problem.

The relationship itself has not caught up with your feelings.

You may still be unsure what he wants. You may not know whether you are actually building towards a relationship or simply enjoying each other's company. Perhaps there has been no real conversation about exclusivity, commitment, or the future.

Yet somehow, your heart is already several steps ahead.

This is where intentional dating becomes important.

The goal is not to become cold, suspicious, or overly calculating. It is not to analyse every WhatsApp message or turn every date into an interview.

It is simply about learning to let your investment grow at the same pace as the evidence.

Because liking someone is a feeling.

Trusting someone is something that is built over time.

And committing to someone should be based on much more than “chemistry”.

Wanting a Relationship Is Not the Same as Rushing Into One

There is absolutely nothing wrong with wanting love.

You can want a serious relationship. You can want marriage. You can hope to meet someone you can build a beautiful life with.

Those desires do not make you desperate.

The problem begins when the desire for a relationship causes you to ignore the process of actually getting to know the person.

You meet someone who ticks a few important boxes and your mind starts filling in the blanks.

“He's ambitious.”

“He seems responsible.”

“He's really caring.”

“He says he wants marriage.”

“He has good family values.”

“He could actually be my person.”

Maybe he can.

But you don't know that yet.

And this distinction matters.

Potential is not evidence.

Someone can have qualities you admire without necessarily being compatible with you. Someone can say all the right things without having developed the character to live those things consistently.

And someone can genuinely like you while still not being ready or willing to build the kind of relationship you want.

That is why intentional dating asks you to slow down—not because love should be slow, but because clarity takes time to develop.

The “Potential” Trap

One of the easiest ways to become emotionally attached too early is to start dating someone's potential instead of their reality.

You see what they *could* become.

You imagine how good the relationship could be if he became more consistent.

You tell yourself that once his work settles down, communication will improve.

Once he is ready, things will become serious.

Once he understands how much you care, he will step up.

Maybe.

But you cannot build a healthy relationship around a collection of “maybe's.”

Consider two women meeting men they like.

Amara meets Tunde. He is charming, ambitious and affectionate. He talks about marriage and tells her he has always wanted a woman he can build with.

Three months later, however, his communication is inconsistent. He avoids conversations about where things are going. He makes plans and regularly changes them. When Amara asks for clarity, he says:

“Why are we trying to rush things? Let's just enjoy ourselves.”

Amara focuses on everything she likes about him.

“He's actually a good man.”

“He has a good heart.”

“He has so much potential.”

So she stays emotionally invested.

Bisi, meanwhile, meets someone she likes just as much.

Instead of immediately assuming where the relationship is going, she pays attention. She enjoys getting to know him. She asks questions. She observes how he treats

people, how he handles disagreement, whether his actions match his words and whether their long-term goals actually align.

She doesn't assume the outcome.

She gathers information.

That is the difference between dating for a desired outcome and dating to discover whether the desired outcome makes sense with this particular person.

Attraction Gets Someone Your Attention. Evidence Earns Your Investment.

Attraction matters.

Chemistry matters.

You should enjoy spending time with the person you're dating.

But attraction answers one question:

“Am I drawn to this person?”

It does not answer:

“Can I build a healthy relationship with this person?”

Those are very different questions.

You might be incredibly attracted to someone who is emotionally unavailable.

You might have amazing chemistry with someone whose values are completely different from yours.

You might laugh for hours with someone who has no intention of committing.

You might meet someone who looks perfect on paper but whose behaviour consistently leaves you anxious and confused.

This is why the Dating Investment Ladder™ starts with something very simple:

Interest comes before investment.

You don't need to decide whether someone is your future husband after the second date.

You don't need to emotionally withdraw either.

You simply need to allow yourself to be interested.

"I like him. Let me get to know him."

That's enough.

The First Shift: Stop Asking "*Does He Like Me?*"

When you really like someone, it is natural to become focused on whether they like you back.

You notice how quickly they reply.

You wonder why they haven't called.

You analyse the tone of their message.

You replay the last conversation.

You ask your friends what they think.

You wonder:

"Does he actually like me?"

But there is another question that is often far more useful:

"What am I learning about him?"

That question puts you back in the driver's seat.

Instead of simply waiting to be chosen, you are also deciding whether you want to choose him.

You begin observing.

Does he keep his word?

Does he respect your boundaries?

Does he communicate honestly?

Does he show consistency?

Does he take responsibility when he gets something wrong?

Does he make space for you?

Does his lifestyle fit reasonably well with the kind of relationship you want?

Does he seem genuinely interested in building something—or does he mainly enjoy the benefits of your attention and affection?

These questions don't necessarily make dating transactional.

They make it intentional.

You Don't Need to Become Suspicious. You Need to Become Observant.

There is a difference between being guarded and being discerning.

Being guarded says:

“Everyone will hurt me, so I need to protect myself.”

Being discerning says:

“I am open to love, but I will pay attention to what I am being shown.”

That is the approach we want to take throughout this guide.

You don't need to assume every man has bad intentions.

You don't need to interrogate someone because they took four hours to respond.

You don't need to interpret every imperfect behaviour as a red flag.

And you certainly don't need to become the woman who is constantly testing, checking and analysing a man.

Instead, learn to look for patterns.

One missed call is not necessarily a problem.

Repeatedly making plans and cancelling them is information.

One quiet day does not automatically mean someone has lost interest.

Consistently disappearing whenever emotional conversations come up is information.

One disagreement does not tell you everything about someone's character.

How they handle disagreement over time tells you much more.

Don't date promises. Date patterns.

Patterns are where character becomes visible.

A Simple Question to Ask Yourself.

The next time you find yourself becoming emotionally attached to someone, pause and ask:

“What has this person actually demonstrated so far?”

Not what they promised.

Not what your friends think.

Not what you hope will happen.

Not what you believe they *could* become.

What have they actually demonstrated?

Maybe the answer is:

“He consistently checks in.”

“He makes plans and follows through.”

“He is clear about what he wants.”

“He respects my boundaries.”

“He listens when I speak.”

“He has been honest about his circumstances.”

Those are pieces of evidence.

But perhaps your answer is:

“He says he wants something serious, but we haven't really discussed what that means.”

“He is affectionate when we're together but disappears for days.”

“He talks about the future, but there is no movement.”

“I keep making excuses for behaviour that makes me uncomfortable.”

That is evidence too.

And evidence doesn't always tell you to walk away.

Sometimes it simply tells you:

Don't climb the ladder yet.

Your Emotional Investment Should Have a Pace

Imagine meeting someone new.

At the beginning, you might invest:

- A little curiosity
- Some conversation
- A few dates
- Your time
- Your attention

As you learn more about the person, you may naturally invest more.

You develop trust.

You become more vulnerable.

You make more room for the relationship.

Eventually, you may decide to become exclusive.

Later, perhaps you begin making serious long-term plans together.

That progression is healthy because each level of emotional investment is supported by new evidence.

The problem is when the emotional investment jumps ahead.

You are still at the “getting to know you” stage, but mentally you are already planning your wedding.

You have had three good dates, but you have already emotionally rejected every other possibility.

He has mentioned that he wants marriage someday, and you've already started imagining what your children might look like.

You barely know him, but you are defending him to friends who have noticed things you haven't.

This is not because you are foolish.

It is because hope can move faster than reality.

The Dating Investment Ladder™ is designed to help you bring those two back into alignment.

Your First Rule of Intentional Dating

Here is the principle I want you to carry with you throughout this guide:

Don't give relationship-level investment to a relationship that has only demonstrated dating-level evidence.

Read that again.

You can like someone without giving them all of you.

You can be hopeful without assuming the outcome.

You can enjoy the excitement of a new connection without mentally moving into the future.

You can be open-hearted while still paying attention.

That is not playing games.

That is emotional wisdom.

And as we move through this guide, you'll learn how to recognise what deserves more of your time, attention and emotional investment—and what doesn't.

Because dating with purpose isn't about becoming harder to love.

It's about becoming more intentional about where you place your love.

And that begins with understanding exactly how your investment should grow.

In the next chapter, we'll look at why even intelligent, self-aware women can find themselves stuck in situationships—and why uncertainty often lasts much longer when we keep trying to interpret behaviour instead of seeking clarity.

Ready for the next chapter?

Chapter 2

The Real Reason Good Women Get Stuck in Situationships

In the last chapter, we looked at one of the most important shifts in intentional dating: your emotional investment should grow with the evidence.

But there is a reason this can be difficult in real life.

Sometimes you meet someone who genuinely seems promising.

He is attractive. You enjoy talking to him. He is thoughtful. There is chemistry. Maybe he has even told you that he likes you.

Nothing seems obviously wrong.

But months later, you are still asking yourself:

“So... what exactly are we?”

This is where many women find themselves stuck.

Not necessarily because the man is terrible.

Not necessarily because they have ignored every warning sign.

Sometimes they are stuck because the relationship has remained unclear for so long that the uncertainty itself has become normal.

And once uncertainty becomes normal, it becomes surprisingly easy to keep investing in it.

When “Let's See How It Goes” Becomes the Relationship

There is nothing wrong with allowing a new connection to develop naturally.

In fact, you should.

You don't need to know on the first date whether someone is going to become your husband.

But there is a difference between giving something room to develop and staying indefinitely in something that refuses to develop.

Imagine you've been seeing someone for several months.

You spend time together.

You talk regularly.

There is physical affection.

You have become emotionally attached.

You know details about his life. He knows details about yours.

But whenever you try to understand where things are heading, you hear:

“Let's not put pressure on it.”

Or:

“Why do we have to label everything?”

Or:

“I'm just taking things one day at a time.”

Sometimes those statements are perfectly reasonable early in dating.

The question is:

How long can “one day at a time” continue before it becomes an excuse for avoiding a decision?

That is where intentional dating becomes important.

You are not demanding a lifetime commitment from someone you barely know.

You are simply making sure that time is producing greater clarity rather than greater confusion.

Chemistry Can Make Confusion Feel Romantic

This is one of the trickiest parts of dating.

When the chemistry is strong, uncertainty can sometimes feel exciting.

You wait for his message.

You wonder what he is thinking.

You replay your last date.

You feel a rush when his name appears on your phone.

When he becomes distant, you miss him.

When he returns, the relief feels wonderful.

That emotional roller coaster can create a very powerful feeling.

But intensity is not necessarily intimacy.

Sometimes what feels like an incredibly strong connection is partly the emotional effect of not knowing where you stand.

Healthy connection tends to become clearer with time.

You learn more about each other.

Trust develops.

Communication improves.

Expectations become easier to discuss.

You become more confident about where you stand.

An unclear relationship can do the opposite.

You become more emotionally attached while remaining just as uncertain.

That is not progress.

More time does not automatically equal more clarity.

The Difference Between Interpreting and Observing

When you really like someone, your mind can become very creative.

He doesn't call.

You think:

Maybe work has been stressful.

He cancels your date.

Maybe something came up.

He doesn't mention the future.

Maybe he's taking his time.

He says he isn't ready for a relationship.

Maybe he just needs to see that I'm different.

None of these explanations is impossible.

The problem is when you keep creating explanations that allow you to ignore the information in front of you.

There is a better approach.

Instead of asking:

“What could this behaviour mean?”

Ask:

“What pattern am I actually experiencing?”

That small change can be incredibly powerful.

Words Matter. But Patterns Matter More.

If a man tells you he wants a serious relationship, that's worth hearing.

But don't stop there.

Ask yourself:

Does his behaviour support what he is saying?

Someone can genuinely say they want marriage and still behave in ways that show they aren't prepared for a committed relationship.

Someone can say they value communication but repeatedly disappear when conversations become uncomfortable.

Someone can say they respect women while consistently ignoring your boundaries.

Someone can tell you that you're important while only making time for you when it is convenient.

This doesn't necessarily mean every person is deliberately lying.

People can sincerely believe one thing about themselves while their behaviour tells another story.

That is why you don't need to become a detective.

You simply need to become an observer.

Look for alignment.

Words + Actions + Consistency

When those three begin to line up, trust has something to grow on.

When they repeatedly contradict each other, pay attention.

A Nigerian Dating Reality: “He’s a Good Man” Is Not the Same as “He’s Right for Me”

This distinction deserves more attention.

Sometimes a woman stays in an unsuitable relationship because she cannot identify anything dramatically wrong with the man.

“He's a good man.”

“He has a good job.”

“He takes care of his family.”

“Everybody likes him.”

“He's respectful.”

All of those things can be true.

And he can still be wrong for you.

A person doesn't have to be a bad person for a relationship to be a bad fit.

Perhaps he wants children and you don't.

Perhaps he wants to relocate permanently while you want to remain close to your family.

Perhaps your expectations around marriage, finances, faith, family involvement or lifestyle are fundamentally different.

Perhaps he likes you but doesn't want the same kind of commitment you want.

Perhaps you want to build a partnership while he wants something casual.

That doesn't require a villain.

It requires clarity.

And clarity is one of the greatest gifts you can give yourself while dating.

The Danger of Dating the Version of Him You Hope Will Arrive

This is where many situationships become difficult to leave.

You are not only attached to the person.

You are attached to the possibility.

You think:

Once he gets through this stressful period...

Once his business becomes more stable...

Once he heals from his previous relationship...

Once he realises how serious I am...

Once he is ready...

Then everything will finally fall into place.

But ask yourself an uncomfortable question:

If this person stayed exactly as he is today, would I still want this relationship?

That question can reveal a lot.

Because you should never have to build your relationship around an imaginary future version of someone.

People can grow.

People can change.

But your dating decisions should be based primarily on who someone is demonstrating themselves to be now, not on the person you hope they eventually become.

When Should You Ask for Clarity?

This is one of the questions women often struggle with.

“Will I look desperate?”

“Will he think I'm putting pressure on him?”

“What if asking makes him leave?”

Here's a healthier way to think about it:

Asking for clarity does not create incompatibility. It reveals it.

If you want a committed relationship and someone doesn't, discovering that early is useful information.

You haven't failed.

You haven't scared away “the one.”

You've simply discovered that the two of you may not want the same thing.

The exact conversation will depend on the stage you're at, but the spirit is simple:

“I'm enjoying getting to know you, and I'm interested in seeing where this could go. I'm also dating with the intention of building a serious relationship, so I'd like to understand what you're looking for too.”

Notice what this does not say.

It doesn't say:

“You must commit to me now.”

It doesn't say:

“Where is this relationship going?”

It doesn't demand a promise.

It simply creates space for two adults to be honest about their intentions.

And that is exactly what intentional dating should encourage.

You Don't Need to Ask Everything at Once

Clarity is not a single conversation.

You don't need to sit down on a third date with a ten-page questionnaire.

Instead, allow important conversations to happen naturally as the relationship progresses.

Early on, you may learn about:

- Lifestyle

- Personality
- Interests
- Values
- Communication style

As things become more serious, you may explore:

- Relationship intentions
- Marriage
- Children
- Family expectations
- Finances
- Career and lifestyle plans
- Faith
- Location
- Conflict and communication

The important thing is not to rush through every topic.

It's to make sure that you aren't avoiding important topics simply because you're afraid of what the answers might reveal.

Sometimes clarity feels uncomfortable because it can threaten the fantasy.

But reality is where good decisions are made.

The “Am I Getting Closer or Just Getting Attached?” Test

Here's a simple check you can use whenever you feel confused about a relationship.

Ask yourself these five questions:

1. Do I know more about this person now than I did three months ago?

Not just their favourite food or their work schedule.

Do you understand their values, character, relationship goals and how they handle real-life situations?

2. Has the relationship become clearer with time?

Are you moving toward greater understanding—or are you still asking the same questions?

3. Are his actions becoming more consistent?

Not perfect.

Consistent.

4. Can we discuss uncomfortable things openly?

A relationship cannot become healthy if every serious conversation feels dangerous.

5. Is my emotional investment growing faster than the relationship itself?

This is perhaps the most important question.

Because sometimes you aren't stuck because the relationship is going nowhere.

You're stuck because your heart has already arrived somewhere the relationship hasn't reached yet.

A Quick Reality Check

Imagine two dating situations.

Situation A

You've been dating for four months.

He consistently makes time for you. You've discussed what you're both looking for. You've talked about important values and future goals. You don't agree on everything, but you can discuss differences respectfully.

You are becoming more emotionally invested.

That investment has evidence behind it.

Situation B

You've been seeing someone for four months.

There is chemistry. You talk frequently. You have strong physical attraction. He says he likes you.

But you have no idea what he wants.

Whenever you ask, the conversation gets vague.

He is inconsistent.

You spend a lot of time worrying about where you stand.

Yet you're becoming more emotionally attached every week.

That is a moment to pause.

Not necessarily to walk away.

Not necessarily to end everything.

But to stop climbing.

This is exactly where the Dating Investment Ladder™ becomes useful.

The Rule We're Building Toward

Think back to the principle from Chapter 1:

Don't give relationship-level investment to a relationship that has only demonstrated dating-level evidence.

Now add this:

If clarity isn't increasing, don't automatically increase your investment.

Your emotions may be saying:

"But I really like him."

That's okay.

You can like him.

You can enjoy the dates.

You can hope things work out.

And you can still pause and ask:

“What do I actually know?”

That is not fear.

That is discernment.

Before You Move Forward

If you recognise yourself in any of these situations, don't use this chapter to judge yourself.

Maybe you've stayed too long before.

Maybe you've confused chemistry with compatibility.

Maybe you've accepted vague answers because you didn't want to lose someone.

Maybe you've invested emotionally before the relationship had earned that level of trust.

You're not being asked to become perfect.

You're being asked to become more aware.

Because once you understand your own dating patterns, you can begin changing them.

And that is where the real transformation starts.

You are about to learn the system that brings everything we've discussed together—the six stages that help you know when to explore, when to evaluate, when to seek clarity, when to invest, and when commitment is actually justified.

That system is The Dating Investment Ladder™.

And once you understand it, dating becomes less about trying to predict whether someone will choose you—and much more about calmly deciding whether the two of you are building something worth choosing.

Ready for the next chapter?

Chapter 3

Meet the Dating Investment Ladder™

By now, you can see why dating with purpose requires more than simply knowing what kind of relationship you want.

You also need a way to pace your investment while you discover whether the person in front of you is actually right for you.

Because here's what often happens.

You meet someone.

You like him.

Then you start spending more time together.

Then you become emotionally attached.

Then you become physically intimate.

Then you start making future plans in your head.

And somewhere along the way, you realise:

“Wait. I don't actually know if we're building the same thing.”

The Dating Investment Ladder™ was created to interrupt that pattern.

It gives you a simple structure for moving from interest to commitment without allowing your emotions to race too far ahead of the relationship.

The goal isn't to make dating rigid.

It's to make your decisions more conscious.

The One Principle Behind the Ladder

If you remember only one thing from this chapter, remember this:

Your emotional investment should increase as evidence increases.

You don't have to stop yourself from liking someone.

You don't have to pretend you're not excited.

You don't have to become emotionally unavailable.

You simply learn to ask:

“What has this relationship earned so far?”

That question changes everything.

Because attention is not commitment.

Chemistry is not compatibility.

Promises are not consistency.

And potential is not partnership.

The Dating Investment Ladder™ helps you separate those things.

The Six Levels of the Dating Investment Ladder™

The Ladder has six stages:

1. Interest

↓

2. Exploration

↓

3. Evaluation

↓

4. Intention

↓

5. Investment

↓

6. Commitment

Each level answers a different question.

And each level requires a different kind of evidence before you move higher.

Let's walk through them.

Level 1 — Interest

“I like this person.”

This is where everything begins.

You meet someone and something catches your attention.

Maybe you find him attractive.

Maybe you enjoy his personality.

Maybe you have an unexpectedly good conversation.

Maybe you admire his ambition, confidence, humour or kindness.

There is a spark.

Good.

Let there be a spark.

You don't need to suppress attraction just because you're trying to date intentionally.

At this stage, your job is incredibly simple:

Be interested without becoming invested.

You are not deciding whether this person is your future husband.

You are simply deciding:

“Would I like to know more about this person?”

That's it.

What belongs at this level?

- Casual conversations
- Getting to know each other
- Going on dates
- Enjoying attraction
- Noticing initial compatibility
- Staying curious

What doesn't belong here?

- Planning your future together
- Becoming emotionally dependent on their attention
- Rearranging your entire life around them
- Assuming exclusivity without discussing it
- Treating early promises as established facts

This stage is about curiosity, not certainty.

Level 2 — Exploration

“Let me get to know this person.”

Now you're spending more time together.

You're learning about each other's lives.

You are beginning to see more than the polished version someone naturally presents at the beginning.

This is where you start paying attention to things like:

- How does he communicate?
- How does he treat people?
- What matters to him?
- What does his lifestyle look like?
- How does he handle inconvenience?
- What does he value?
- How does he talk about relationships?

- How does he respond when something doesn't go his way?

You are gathering information.

And this is important:

You are not gathering information so you can find reasons to reject him.

You are gathering information so you can make a better decision.

There's a difference.

Don't Interview. Observe.

Intentional dating does not mean turning every date into an interrogation.

You don't need to sit across from someone at a restaurant in Lagos and start ticking boxes:

- ☐ Wants marriage
- ☐ Has good job
- ☐ Likes children
- ☐ Has car
- ☐ Passes test

Real compatibility is more nuanced than that.

Instead, allow conversations and experiences to reveal things naturally.

For example, you might discover how someone handles a disagreement when your dinner reservation goes wrong.

You might learn about his relationship with family through ordinary conversation.

You might discover his attitude towards money by discussing everyday lifestyle choices.

You might learn whether he respects your boundaries when you say no to something.

Information comes from both conversation and observation.

Level 3 — Evaluation

“Are we actually compatible?”

This is where dating becomes more intentional.

You already know you like the person.

You've spent enough time together to see beyond the first impression.

Now you need to ask:

“Would this actually work?”

Because liking someone is not enough to build a life together.

You might have wonderful chemistry and still have completely different expectations about marriage.

You might enjoy each other's company but have incompatible lifestyles.

You might agree on wanting a relationship but disagree fundamentally about what that relationship should look like.

This is where you begin evaluating deeper areas of compatibility.

Consider:

Values

What principles matter to both of you?

Lifestyle

How do you each want to live?

Family

What role do family relationships play in your lives?

Marriage

Do you both want marriage? What does marriage mean to each of you?

Children

Do you want them? How do you imagine family life?

Faith

Are your beliefs compatible enough to support the relationship you want?

Money

How do you think about earning, spending, saving and financial responsibility?

Career

What role does work play in your lives?

Location

Where do you want to live? Are major moves possible or necessary?

You don't need identical answers.

Compatibility does not mean becoming the same person.

But major differences should be understood rather than ignored.

Level 4 — Intention

“Are we both looking for the same kind of relationship?”

This is where many women stay stuck.

They know they like each other.

They've established some compatibility.

But they haven't established whether they are actually moving in the same direction.

This is where intentions matter.

A man can genuinely enjoy dating you and still not be looking for the same relationship you are.

He may want companionship.

You may want marriage.

He may be comfortable with something casual.

You may want exclusivity.

He may want to “see where things go.”

You may want to date with a clear intention to build a serious relationship.

Neither person is necessarily wrong.

But you may not be aligned.

Clarity is not pressure.

You are allowed to say:

“I'm enjoying getting to know you, and I'm dating with the intention of building a serious relationship. I'd like to understand what you're looking for too.”

That's not desperation.

That's information.

And information allows you to make decisions.

Level 5 — Investment

“Has this person demonstrated enough for deeper emotional investment?”

This is the level where things become more serious.

You have gathered information.

You've evaluated compatibility.

You've discussed intentions.

Now you're asking whether this person has earned deeper trust.

This doesn't mean he needs to be perfect.

Nobody is.

It means you have seen enough consistency to reasonably believe that the relationship deserves more of your emotional energy.

You may begin:

- Becoming more emotionally vulnerable
- Making more space for the relationship
- Building deeper trust
- Becoming more exclusive
- Integrating parts of your lives
- Making intentional plans together

Notice the order.

Investment comes after evidence.

Not before.

What Does Someone Have to Demonstrate?

Look for patterns such as:

Consistency

Does what he says generally match what he does?

Reliability

Can you depend on him to follow through?

Emotional maturity

Can he discuss difficult things without becoming disrespectful, manipulative or completely avoidant?

Respect

Does he honour your boundaries, time, values and individuality?

Mutual effort

Are you both contributing to the relationship?

Compatibility

Do your important values and life goals fit together?

Intention

Are you both genuinely trying to build the same kind of relationship?

These are the things that make deeper investment sensible.

Level 6 — Commitment

“Are we intentionally building the same future together?”

Commitment is not simply:

“We really like each other.”

It is a mutual decision.

Both people are choosing the relationship.

Both understand what they are committing to.

Both are prepared to show up consistently.

Both are moving towards a shared future.

At this stage, conversations become more concrete.

What does exclusivity mean?

What does marriage mean?

What are your expectations?

How will you handle finances?

Where might you live?

How do you approach family?

How will you handle disagreements?

What kind of life are you trying to build together?

These conversations aren't designed to kill romance.

They protect it from being built on assumptions.

The Ladder Is Not a Race

One of the biggest misunderstandings about intentional dating is the belief that every relationship should move through the stages at exactly the same speed.

That's not true.

There is no universal number of dates for each stage.

There is no magic three-month rule.

There is no formula that says:

Date 1 → Interest

Date 4 → Exploration

Month 3 → Evaluation

Month 6 → Commitment

Real relationships don't work like that.

People have different circumstances.

Some connections develop quickly.

Others take longer.

The point of the Ladder isn't to tell you how fast to move.

It's to help you recognise whether you have enough evidence to move.

That is a much more useful question.

You Can Move Down the Ladder Too

This is extremely important.

The Ladder isn't something you climb once and never revisit.

Suppose you've reached the Investment stage.

Then you discover something significant.

Perhaps you realise your long-term goals don't align.

Perhaps his behaviour becomes consistently inconsistent.

Perhaps you discover that what he said he wanted isn't what he actually wants.

You don't have to keep climbing simply because you've already invested.

You can pause.

You can step back.

You can reconsider.

You can even leave.

Previous investment does not obligate future investment.

Just because you've spent six months getting to know someone doesn't mean you owe them another six months.

Just because you introduced someone to your friends doesn't mean you must marry them.

Just because you became emotionally attached doesn't mean you have to stay where the relationship no longer makes sense.

Intentional dating requires the courage to update your decision when new information appears.

The Ladder in Real Life

Let's return to Amara from the previous chapters.

She meets Tunde and immediately feels attracted to him.

Level 1 — Interest

She thinks:

“I really like this guy.”

Perfect.

She allows herself to enjoy the connection.

Level 2 — Exploration

She starts paying attention.

She discovers how he communicates, how he treats people, what his lifestyle looks like and what matters to him.

Level 3 — Evaluation

She realises they have strong chemistry, but she also notices that they have different expectations about marriage and family.

Now she has something to think about.

Level 4 — Intention

They discuss what they're both looking for.

Tunde says he isn't sure whether he wants marriage anytime soon.

Amara knows that marriage is important to her.

Now she has clarity.

What should she do?

Not automatically leave.

Not automatically stay.

But make a decision based on the information.

That's the power of the Ladder.

It doesn't make the decision for you.

It helps you make a better one.

Your New Dating Question

Before you move higher on the Ladder, ask:

“What has this relationship demonstrated that it hadn't demonstrated before?”

If the answer is:

“We've developed greater trust.”

Good.

“We've had important conversations.”

Good.

“He has consistently shown up.”

Good.

“We've discovered that our values and future goals align.”

Good.

“We've both clearly expressed the same relationship intention.”

Good.

Those are reasons to consider moving forward.

But if the answer is:

“I just like him more.”

Pause.

That's a feeling—not new evidence.

Or:

“I'm scared someone else will get him.”

Pause.

That's fear—not evidence.

Or:

“We've been together for a long time, so I feel like I have to keep going.”

Pause.

That's sunk-cost thinking—not evidence.

Your feelings deserve respect.

But they shouldn't always be the only thing making the decision.

The Dating Investment Ladder™ Rulebook

As you move through the rest of this guide, keep these five rules close:

Rule 1: Attraction earns attention—not commitment.

You can be attracted to someone without deciding they are your person.

Rule 2: Time should create information.

If months pass and you know no more about the relationship than you did at the beginning, don't automatically increase your investment.

Rule 3: Words open the door. Patterns build trust.

Listen to what someone says, but watch what they consistently do.

Rule 4: Investment should follow evidence.

Don't give someone relationship-level access based on dating-level behaviour.

Rule 5: You are also choosing.

Dating isn't simply about whether someone will choose you.

You are gathering information about whether you want to choose them.

Your Dating Investment Ladder™ At a Glance

Level	The Question	Your Focus
1. Interest	Do I like this person?	Attraction & curiosity
2. Exploration	Who is this person really?	Getting to know them
3. Evaluation	Are we compatible?	Values, lifestyle & character
4. Intention	Do we want the same thing?	Relationship direction
5. Investment	Has this been earned?	Trust, consistency & deeper connection
6. Commitment	Are we building the same future?	Mutual commitment

Keep this table.

Come back to it whenever your emotions begin moving faster than the relationship.

Because the goal isn't to stop yourself from falling in love.

The goal is to fall with your eyes open.

And now that you have the Ladder, we can get much more practical.

The next question is:

What should you actually look for while you're moving through the first few levels?

How do you distinguish genuine chemistry from compatibility?

What should you observe during the early stages?

And how do you enjoy getting to know someone without becoming emotionally attached before you've discovered whether the relationship deserves that investment?

That's where we go next.

Chapter 4

“Don’t Climb the Ladder Just Because You Feel Chemistry”

Now that you understand the Dating Investment Ladder™, there is an important question to answer:

How do you actually know when you have enough evidence to move higher?

Because this is where dating gets complicated.

You meet someone and the chemistry is undeniable.

The conversations flow.

You laugh easily.

There is attraction.

You feel comfortable around him.

Maybe even your friends can see the spark.

And because the connection feels so good, it becomes tempting to assume that everything else will eventually fall into place.

But chemistry can tell you that you enjoy someone.

It cannot, by itself, tell you whether you can build a life with them.

That distinction can save you from a lot of unnecessary heartbreak.

Chemistry Is Wonderful. It Just Isn’t a Full Compatibility Test.

Let's be clear: chemistry matters.

You don't want to build a relationship with someone you feel absolutely nothing for simply because they look good on paper.

You want attraction.

You want laughter.

You want affection.

You want to enjoy each other's company.

You want to feel excited when you see their name on your phone.

There is nothing wrong with any of that.

The problem comes when chemistry becomes the only evidence you're using to decide whether someone is right for you.

Think about it this way.

Chemistry answers:

“Do I feel something for this person?”

Compatibility asks:

“Can our lives actually work together?”

Those are different questions.

And intentional dating requires you to ask both.

The Chemistry Trap

Strong chemistry can make someone feel unusually familiar.

You may think:

“I've never connected with someone like this before.”

Maybe you haven't.

But that doesn't necessarily mean you've found your person.

Sometimes chemistry is simply a combination of attraction, personality, timing, novelty and emotional connection.

It can be genuine and still not be enough.

You could have incredible chemistry with someone whose long-term goals are completely different from yours.

You could have amazing conversations with someone who isn't emotionally available.

You could feel deeply understood by someone who doesn't want the kind of relationship you want.

You could have wonderful dates with someone whose lifestyle would eventually make you miserable.

The chemistry isn't fake.

It is simply incomplete information.

And incomplete information should not receive complete emotional investment.

The Difference Between “I Like Him” and “I Like Who We Are Together”

This is a subtle but powerful distinction.

You can really like someone and still discover that the relationship doesn't work for you.

For example:

You might admire his ambition but dislike how little time he has for relationships.

You might love his independence but discover that your expectations around communication are very different.

You might enjoy his spontaneous lifestyle while knowing you prefer structure and stability.

You might admire his close family ties but realise that your expectations around family involvement are completely different.

You might have strong physical chemistry but very different views about marriage.

None of this makes either person bad.

It simply means liking someone isn't the same thing as being compatible with them.

This is why the Evaluation stage exists on the Dating Investment Ladder™.

Before your investment grows too deep, you need to ask:

“Do I like this person, and do I like the relationship we are capable of creating together?”

Don't Turn Every Date Into an Evaluation Exercise

At this point, you might be thinking:

“So now I have to analyse everything?”

No.

Please don't.

Intentional dating is not supposed to make you anxious.

You should still laugh.

Enjoy your dinner.

Go to that art exhibition.

Talk about music.

Watch a film.

Have playful conversations.

Flirt.

Enjoy being attracted to someone.

The goal isn't to sit across from a man in a restaurant mentally scoring his personality.

The goal is to stay present while also staying aware.

You can enjoy the date and still notice things.

You can laugh at his jokes and still pay attention to how he speaks about people.

You can enjoy his affection and still notice whether he respects your boundaries.

You can be excited about him and still remain curious about who he really is.

That's emotional balance.

What Should You Actually Be Watching?

During the Interest and Exploration stages, you are not trying to uncover every detail about someone's life.

Instead, pay attention to a few fundamental areas.

1. Character

How does this person behave when nobody is trying to impress anyone?

Notice how he treats:

- Service workers
- Friends
- Family
- Strangers
- People he disagrees with

Someone's character isn't revealed only through how beautifully he treats the woman he's trying to impress.

It also appears in how he treats people from whom he has nothing to gain.

2. Consistency

Does his behaviour generally match what he says?

If he says he'll call, does he usually call?

If he makes plans, does he generally follow through?

If something changes, does he communicate?

Consistency doesn't mean perfection.

People get busy.

Plans change.

Life happens.

The question is whether there is a reliable pattern of effort.

3. Emotional Maturity

Can he have an uncomfortable conversation?

Can he acknowledge when he's wrong?

Can he apologise without immediately explaining why everything was actually your fault?

Can he disagree without becoming disrespectful?

Can he listen without turning every concern into an attack?

You don't need someone who never makes mistakes.

You need someone capable of repairing mistakes.

That is a much more realistic standard.

4. Boundaries

Watch what happens when you say no.

This can tell you a lot.

A healthy person may be disappointed.

They may ask questions.

They may have a different preference.

But they should still be able to respect your boundary.

If someone repeatedly pressures, guilt-trips, mocks or punishes you for having boundaries, don't dismiss that simply because you have chemistry.

How someone responds to your “no” tells you something about how they may handle your needs later.

5. Relationship Mindset

Listen to how someone talks about relationships.

Does he speak about partnership?

Does he take responsibility for his previous relationship experiences?

Does every ex become “crazy”?

Does he describe himself as the victim in every story?

Does he believe relationships require communication and compromise?

Does he seem interested in knowing you—or mostly interested in what you can provide?

You don't have to diagnose anyone.

Just listen.

Sometimes people tell you who they are without realizing it.

The Nigerian Context Matters Too

Dating does not happen in a vacuum.

For many Nigerian women, relationship decisions can involve more than just two people.

Family expectations can matter.

Marriage timelines can matter.

Faith can matter.

Career ambitions can matter.

Where you live can matter.

Questions around children, finances, extended family and gender roles can matter.

And sometimes there can be pressure from the people around you.

“Are you still single?”

“When are we coming for introduction?”

“Is there somebody?”

“You're not getting younger.”

Those comments may come from people who love you.

But they should not become the reason you ignore incompatibility.

A relationship that looks good to your family but doesn't work for the two people inside it is still a difficult relationship.

Your goal isn't simply to find someone who can satisfy an external timeline.

It's to find someone with whom you can build a relationship that actually works.

The Evidence Check™

Here is a simple exercise you can use while dating.

Whenever you feel yourself becoming more emotionally invested, ask yourself:

What do I know?

Write down the things you've personally observed.

For example:

- He communicates consistently.
- He respects my boundaries.

- He has been clear about wanting a serious relationship.
- He follows through on plans.
- We've discussed our expectations around marriage.
- Our lifestyle preferences are reasonably aligned.

Then ask:

What am I assuming?

Maybe:

- "He'll become more serious eventually."
- "He probably wants marriage because he mentioned it once."
- "Once his business improves, he'll have more time."
- "He is different from my previous experiences."
- "I know he would never hurt me."

That second list deserves caution.

Assumptions can feel like evidence when you really want something to work.

The Evidence Check™ helps you separate the two.

A Simple Example

Let's say you've been dating a man for six weeks.

You have excellent chemistry.

You talk for hours.

He tells you you're different from other women he's dated.

He says he can see himself settling down eventually.

You are already imagining what the relationship might become.

Now stop.

What do you actually know?

Perhaps:

Evidence:

- He consistently makes time for you.
- He follows through on plans.
- He respects your boundaries.
- He communicates clearly.
- You've discussed what you're both looking for.

Assumptions:

- He will definitely marry me.
- He will become more emotionally open.
- Our families will get along.
- We will eventually agree about children.
- He will always treat me this well.

Notice the difference?

You can enjoy the relationship without pretending the assumptions are facts.

The “Future Husband” Problem

Sometimes women don't fall in love with the man they're dating.

They fall in love with the future they imagine with him.

This can happen surprisingly early.

You hear him talk about wanting children.

You discover that he loves family.

You notice he is good with children.

And suddenly your brain creates the rest of the story.

He'll make a great father.

Our children will love him.

His mother seems nice.

Our families could work.

Maybe this is finally it.

There's nothing wrong with imagining a future.

But imagination should never be mistaken for information.

You are allowed to dream.

Just don't make decisions based entirely on the dream.

Your Investment Should Match the Stage

This is where the Dating Investment Ladder™ becomes practical.

At Interest:

You give attention.

You get to know him.

At Exploration:

You give time and curiosity.

You observe.

At Evaluation:

You give thoughtful consideration.

You look at compatibility.

At Intention:

You give honest conversations.

You find out whether you're moving in the same direction.

At Investment:

You give deeper emotional energy.

Trust and vulnerability increase.

At Commitment:

You give intentional partnership.

You begin building a shared future.

The problem isn't giving.

The problem is giving too much, too early, without enough evidence.

Don't Confuse Being Desired With Being Valued

Someone can desire you without being prepared to build with you.

He may find you beautiful.

He may be sexually attracted to you.

He may enjoy your company.

He may miss you.

He may even genuinely care about you.

Those things are meaningful.

But ask yourself:

Is he also demonstrating the qualities required for the kind of relationship I want?

Because being wanted feels good.

Being valued, respected and intentionally chosen is different.

You are looking for both attraction and alignment.

A Better Way to Think About “Red Flags”

Not every uncomfortable moment is a red flag.

Sometimes people simply have different personalities.

Someone may communicate differently from you.

Someone may need more time to open up.

Someone may make an occasional mistake.

Someone may disagree with you.

That's normal.

The better question is:

“What happens consistently, and what happens when I communicate my concern?”

A healthy relationship isn't one where nobody ever gets things wrong.

It's one where problems can be addressed.

That's why patterns and responses are often more informative than isolated incidents.

Your Chemistry Is Allowed to Exist

You don't need to kill the excitement.

You don't need to tell yourself:

“Don't like him too much.”

“Don't smile too much.”

“Don't get excited.”

“Act unavailable.”

That's not intentional dating.

That's performance.

Instead, try this:

Enjoy the chemistry.

Stay curious about compatibility.

Let consistency build trust.

Let clarity guide investment.

That's the balance.

You don't have to choose between being soft and being wise.

You can be both.

Your Chapter 4 Check-In

Before moving further up the Dating Investment Ladder™, ask yourself:

About the person:

- What do I genuinely admire about them?
- What have they consistently demonstrated?
- How do they handle boundaries?
- How do they handle disagreement?
- Do their actions generally match their words?

About us:

- Do we enjoy each other's company?
- Do our important values appear compatible?
- Are our lifestyles reasonably aligned?
- Do we want the same kind of relationship?
- Is our connection becoming clearer with time?

About me:

- Am I enjoying this person—or already planning a future with them?

- Am I responding to evidence or potential?
- Has my emotional investment moved ahead of the relationship?
- Am I ignoring anything because I don't want to lose the connection?

You don't need perfect answers.

You need honest ones.

Because the purpose of the Dating Investment Ladder™ isn't to help you find reasons to reject people.

It is to help you stop rejecting reality when reality doesn't match what you hoped for.

The Rule to Carry Forward

Chemistry can open the door. Compatibility determines whether you should stay in the room.

And there is still another piece missing.

Even if you have chemistry.

Even if you're compatible.

Even if you enjoy one another.

You still need to know:

Are you both actually trying to build the same thing?

Because two people can be attracted to each other, compatible in many ways, and still want completely different relationships.

In the next chapter, we'll look at intentions, consistency and the deeper evidence you need before giving someone more of your heart.

That is where the Ladder begins to separate “I really like him” from “This relationship is actually earning my investment.”

Ready for the next chapter?

Chapter 5

Before You Give More, Look for These Things

In the last chapter, we talked about chemistry—and why feeling strongly about someone is not the same as knowing that you are compatible.

That distinction matters because this is where many women begin to move quickly.

You like him.

He likes you.

The conversations are flowing.

You are spending more time together.

Maybe he is thoughtful, attractive, ambitious, emotionally expressive—or simply different from the men you have dated before.

And before you realise it, your emotional investment has moved several steps ahead of the actual relationship.

You are thinking about where this could go.

You are imagining what life together might look like.

You are becoming emotionally attached.

But there is still one important question:

What has this person actually demonstrated?

Not what he has promised.

Not what you hope will happen.

Not what your friends think.

Not what you can imagine if everything goes perfectly.

What has he consistently shown you?

That is the question that protects the **Dating Investment Ladder™**.

Because as you move from Evaluation toward Intention and Investment, the standard should become clearer—not lower.

Consistency Is More Important Than Intensity

One of the easiest things to mistake for genuine interest is intensity.

Someone can text you all day.

Call you every night.

Plan an amazing date.

Tell you how different you are.

Talk about marriage.

Say all the right things.

And still not be capable of building a healthy relationship.

This doesn't mean those things are meaningless.

It means they are pieces of information, not final proof.

Consistency asks a different question:

Does the behaviour continue when the excitement becomes normal?

Anyone can be impressive for a few weeks.

You learn much more by watching what happens over time.

Does he follow through when he says he will?

Does he communicate when plans change?

Does he respect your boundaries even when they inconvenience him?

Can he apologise without turning the conversation into an argument?

Does his interest remain steady when he is busy?

Does he make room for you without making you feel like you have to compete for basic attention?

These patterns tell you much more than a perfect first month.

Remember:

Intensity can create excitement. Consistency creates evidence.

You are not looking for perfection.

You are looking for a pattern you can reasonably trust.

You Don't Need to Interrogate Someone to Understand Their Intentions

There is another common fear around intentional dating:

“If I ask what he wants too early, won't I scare him away?”

Maybe.

But if a simple, respectful question about relationship intentions makes someone disappear, that information is useful.

You don't need to conduct an interview on the first date.

You also don't need to sit silently for six months hoping the relationship eventually explains itself.

Intentional dating creates room for honest conversations as the relationship develops.

For example, instead of asking:

“So, are you going to marry me?”

You can ask:

“What does a serious relationship look like for you at this stage of your life?”

That question gives you something valuable.

Information.

You can learn whether he is actively interested in building a committed relationship, whether he is casually dating, whether he is uncertain, or whether his idea of “serious” is completely different from yours.

And remember: his answer is information—not a contract.

Someone can tell you exactly what you want to hear.

That is why intention must eventually be compared with behaviour.

Pay Attention to the Big Compatibility Questions

You don't need to agree on everything to have a healthy relationship.

But some differences matter more than others.

As you move up the Dating Investment Ladder™, start paying attention to the areas that could significantly affect your future.

Marriage and commitment

Do you both see marriage as something you want?

If you do, are you both approaching it with similar seriousness?

You don't need the exact same timeline, but a major difference in direction matters.

Children

Do you both want children?

If yes, do you have broadly compatible expectations around when and how you would build a family?

This is not a small detail to discover after becoming deeply attached.

Faith and values

How important is faith or spirituality to each of you?

How might that affect your home, your children, your lifestyle, and major decisions?

You don't necessarily need identical beliefs.

But you should understand whether your differences can realistically coexist.

Money and lifestyle

Money is one of those subjects people sometimes avoid because it feels too serious.

But relationships are lived in the real world.

How does each person think about spending, saving, debt, generosity, financial responsibility, and career?

You don't need someone's bank statement to evaluate compatibility.

You do need to understand their mindset.

Family and extended family

This can be especially important in Nigerian relationships.

Family expectations can influence where you live, how often you visit relatives, caregiving responsibilities, cultural practices, marriage ceremonies, and many other parts of life.

You don't need to predict every future family situation.

But you should eventually understand how each person thinks about family involvement and boundaries.

Gender roles

What does each person believe a husband should do?

What does each person believe a wife should do?

How should household responsibilities be shared?

What happens when both people are working?

What does each person expect around finances, parenting, domestic responsibilities, and decision-making?

These conversations may not feel romantic.

They are still important.

Because compatibility is not only about whether you enjoy being together.

It is also about whether you can build a life that works for both of you.

The Difference Between Preferences and Non-Negotiables

This is another area where intentional dating becomes much easier when you are honest with yourself.

You may prefer someone who is tall.

That is a preference.

You may prefer someone who enjoys travelling.

That is a preference.

You may prefer someone who is naturally expressive with affection.

That may be a preference.

But honesty, respect, emotional safety, shared relationship goals, and basic compatibility may be non-negotiable for you.

The problem begins when preferences become rigid requirements while genuine deal-breakers are treated as small inconveniences.

Before you become deeply invested, ask yourself:

“Is this something I genuinely need, or is it simply something I would like?”

That question can save you from rejecting someone who could be compatible because they don't match an imaginary checklist.

It can also save you from staying with someone who looks perfect on paper but consistently violates the things that actually matter.

The Consistency Test™

When you are unsure whether someone's words and actions align, try the Consistency Test™.

Ask yourself these five questions:

1. What did he say?

Write down the actual promise, statement, or intention.

Not your interpretation.

His words.

2. What did he do?

Look at the behaviour that followed.

Did his actions support what he said?

3. Is this a pattern?

One missed call is not necessarily inconsistency.

Repeatedly saying he will call and repeatedly disappearing is different.

One cancelled plan can happen.

Repeatedly cancelling without making reasonable effort to reschedule tells you something else.

4. What happens when I communicate the issue?

This question is often more revealing than the original behaviour.

Does he listen?

Does he become defensive?

Does he dismiss your feelings?

Does he make excuses?

Does he take responsibility?

Does anything actually change?

5. Has the pattern improved?

People are allowed to make mistakes.

Healthy relationships are not built between two people who never get anything wrong.

They are built between people who can recognise problems, communicate about them, and make meaningful adjustments.

The goal is not perfection. The goal is evidence of character.

A Simple Example

Imagine Amara has been dating Tunde for about three months.

Tunde is affectionate and tells her he is serious about her.

But he frequently cancels plans at the last minute.

The first few times, Amara explains it away.

“He's busy.”

“Work is stressful.”

“Maybe I'm expecting too much.”

Eventually, she brings it up calmly.

Tunde listens and says he understands.

For the next few weeks, his behaviour improves.

He communicates earlier when his schedule changes.

He makes alternative plans when he cannot keep an arrangement.

He becomes more reliable.

That is useful evidence.

Now imagine a different version.

Amara raises the same concern.

Tunde tells her she is being needy.

He continues cancelling plans.

He becomes affectionate again whenever she pulls away.

Then the same cycle repeats.

That is also evidence.

In both situations, there was a problem.

The important difference was what happened after the problem was communicated.

This is why you should not judge a relationship by one uncomfortable moment.

Judge it by the pattern—and by what happens when the pattern is addressed.

Don't Ignore Lifestyle Alignment

Sometimes two people have good chemistry and good intentions but completely different lifestyles.

One person wants to relocate abroad within two years.

The other wants to remain close to family in Nigeria.

One wants a very traditional marriage.

The other wants a highly independent partnership.

One wants children soon.

The other isn't sure they want children at all.

One values a very social lifestyle.

The other prefers a quiet home life.

None of these automatically makes either person wrong.

But they can make a relationship difficult if neither person is willing or able to accommodate the difference.

This is why compatibility should not be reduced to:

“He's a good man.”

The better question is:

“Is the life we are trying to build compatible?”

A person can be kind, successful, attractive, responsible, and genuinely interested in you—and still not be the right partner for the life you want.

That is not failure.

That is discernment.

Your Emotional Investment Should Still Only Follow the Evidence

At this point, you may be wondering:

“How much should I actually invest?”

The answer remains the same principle we established in Chapter 3:

Your emotional investment should increase as evidence increases.

If you are still learning basic things about someone's character, don't build an entire future around them.

If you have established compatibility but have not discussed relationship intentions, don't behave as though a commitment already exists.

If intentions are aligned but consistency has not yet been demonstrated, keep observing.

If someone has repeatedly shown consistency, emotional maturity, compatibility, and shared intention, deeper investment may make sense.

This is not about playing games.

It is about protecting reality from being replaced by imagination.

Before You Move Higher on the Ladder, Ask Yourself...

Take a moment and answer these honestly:

What do I know about this person because I have observed it?

What do I believe because they told me?

What am I assuming because I hope it is true?

Do our relationship goals actually align?

Have I seen consistency over time?

Can we discuss uncomfortable subjects without fear or manipulation?

Do I respect who this person is today—not just who they could become?

If nothing about this person changed, would I still choose this relationship?

That final question can be especially revealing.

Because sometimes what we are really attached to is not the relationship we have.

It is the relationship we are hoping to have.

And those are two very different things.

The goal of intentional dating is not to become suspicious of everyone.

It is not to analyse every text message.

It is not to keep emotional distance until someone passes a secret test.

It is simply to become more comfortable letting evidence guide your investment.

You can enjoy someone's company.

You can feel excited.

You can be hopeful.

You can even fall in love.

But you do not have to abandon discernment simply because your feelings are growing.

And sometimes, the most loving thing you can do for yourself is pause before giving more.

Because the next question is not only, “Is this person good?”

It is:

“Has this relationship given me enough evidence to move forward?”

In the next chapter, we'll answer that question more directly—and look at how to know when to move up, pause, slow down, or walk away without second-guessing yourself.

Ready for the next chapter?

Chapter 6

Know When to Move Up, Pause, or Walk Away

By now, you understand the Dating Investment Ladder™ and why your emotional investment should increase as evidence increases.

You also know what to look for:

Consistency.

Compatibility.

Character.

Intentions.

Patterns.

But there is one more skill that makes intentional dating work:

Knowing what to do with the information you discover.

Because gathering evidence is only useful if you are willing to act on it.

Sometimes the evidence tells you:

“This is going well. Keep going.”

Sometimes it says:

“Slow down. You don't know enough yet.”

Sometimes it says:

“We need to have a conversation.”

And sometimes, even when your feelings are strong, it says:

“This is not the relationship for you.”

That last one can be difficult.

Especially when you have already invested time, emotions, hopes, conversations, dates, intimacy, or months of your life.

But intentional dating is not about making every relationship work.

It is about becoming better at recognising which relationships deserve more of your investment.

Moving Up: When the Evidence Is Getting Stronger

Moving up the Dating Investment Ladder™ does not mean suddenly becoming more serious because a certain number of weeks have passed.

There is no universal rule that says:

“After three dates, move here.”

“After three months, move there.”

Your relationship may move faster or slower than someone else's.

What matters is whether the evidence supports the next level of investment.

For example, moving from Exploration toward Evaluation might make sense when you have learned enough about the person to start asking deeper compatibility questions.

Moving from Evaluation toward Intention might make sense when there is enough mutual interest to have an honest conversation about what each of you wants.

Moving toward deeper Investment becomes more reasonable when you have seen consistent behaviour, discussed important areas of compatibility, established aligned intentions, and observed how the person handles real-life situations.

The question is always:

“What has this relationship demonstrated that justifies my next level of investment?”

Signs You May Be Ready to Move Up

You may have enough evidence to move forward when:

- Their words and actions generally align.
- Their interest is consistent rather than unpredictable.
- You can communicate honestly without constantly fearing their reaction.
- You have learned enough about their character to make a thoughtful assessment.
- Your important relationship goals appear reasonably aligned.
- They respect your boundaries.
- They take responsibility when they make mistakes.
- You both show interest in building something more intentional.
- The relationship is becoming clearer rather than more confusing.

Notice something important here.

None of these requires perfection.

Your future partner will have bad days.

They will make mistakes.

They may communicate poorly sometimes.

They may disappoint you occasionally.

The question is not: “Have I found a flawless person?”

It is: “What kind of pattern am I seeing?”

Healthy relationships are built by imperfect people who can communicate, repair, learn, and grow.

When to Pause

Sometimes the answer is not “leave.”

It is simply: Pause.

A pause means you stop increasing your emotional investment while you gather more information.

This can be especially useful when you genuinely like someone but something does not yet make sense.

Maybe you have strong chemistry, but you haven't discussed relationship intentions.

Maybe his words sound promising, but you haven't seen enough consistency.

Maybe you have discovered an important compatibility difference and need to understand it better.

Maybe you notice yourself becoming deeply attached while you still know very little about his actual life, values, or relationship history.

You don't have to make a dramatic decision immediately.

You can simply stop climbing.

This is one of the most powerful ideas in the Dating Investment Ladder™:

You are allowed to stay at the same level while you learn more.

You don't have to move forward just because your feelings are moving forward.

The “Slow Down” Signal

Here's a simple test.

Ask yourself: “Is my emotional investment increasing faster than the evidence?”

If the answer is yes, slow down.

For example:

You have been seeing someone for six weeks.

You think about him constantly.

You have already told your friends about your future together.

You are emotionally attached.

You have started making decisions around him.

But you haven't discussed whether you both want a serious relationship.

You haven't explored important compatibility areas.

And his consistency is still uncertain.

Your feelings may be completely genuine.

But the relationship evidence has not caught up with your emotional investment.

That is a good moment to slow down.

Not because you are doing something wrong.

Because you are protecting yourself from building a future on incomplete information.

When Clarity Is Needed

Sometimes the next step is a conversation.

You notice something important.

You don't understand where the relationship is going.

You have different expectations.

You need to know whether you are both dating exclusively.

You are uncomfortable with a repeated behaviour.

This is where many women become tempted to “wait and see.”

Sometimes waiting is reasonable.

But sometimes waiting simply allows uncertainty to continue.

If a question matters to you, it deserves to be addressed.

You can be calm and direct.

For example:

“I'm enjoying getting to know you, and I'm interested in seeing where this goes. I also want to understand what you're looking for at this stage.”

Or:

“We’ve been spending more time together, so I’d like us to talk about what we’re both expecting from this relationship.”

Or:

“I noticed this has happened a few times, and I’d like to understand what’s going on.”

Notice the difference between clarity and pressure.

Clarity asks for information. Pressure demands a particular answer.

You are allowed to ask.

He is allowed to answer honestly.

And you are allowed to decide what his answer means for you.

When Repeated Confusion Is Actually an Answer

This may be one of the hardest lessons in intentional dating.

Sometimes you keep asking yourself:

“Does he really like me?”

“Is he serious?”

“Why does he disappear?”

“Why does he come back?”

“Why won’t he define this?”

“Maybe he is just scared.”

“Maybe he is busy.”

“Maybe I should give him more time.”

There may be a legitimate explanation.

But if you have been experiencing the same uncertainty repeatedly, the uncertainty itself has become information.

You don't necessarily need to discover a hidden reason.

You need to look at the pattern.

Someone can genuinely like you and still not be ready for the relationship you want.

Someone can have feelings for you and still be emotionally unavailable.

Someone can enjoy your company and still not intend to build a committed relationship.

Someone can be a good person and still be the wrong person for you.

This is why the question:

“Does he like me?”

is sometimes much less useful than:

“Is the relationship he is offering compatible with the relationship I want?”

That question brings you back to reality.

Don't Negotiate Yourself Out of Your Standards

There is a difference between being flexible and abandoning your standards.

Flexibility sounds like:

“He communicates differently from me, but we can find a rhythm that works for both of us.”

Abandoning yourself sounds like:

“I don't really like how he communicates, but maybe if I become less demanding, I'll finally get the relationship I want.”

Flexibility sounds like:

“We have different approaches to money, so let's understand each other's values and see whether we can build a system together.”

Abandoning yourself sounds like:

“Financial responsibility is important to me, but I'll ignore this because I really like him.”

A healthy relationship may require compromise.

But compromise should not require you to repeatedly betray your own values.

The Cost of Staying Because You've Already Invested

There is another trap that can keep women in relationships longer than they should stay:

“I've already invested so much.”

You've spent months together.

You've introduced him to your friends.

Your family knows about him.

You've become emotionally attached.

Maybe you've been physically intimate.

Maybe you turned down other opportunities because you thought this relationship was becoming serious.

So walking away feels like admitting that all of it was wasted.

But previous investment does not automatically justify future investment.

Imagine you bought a dress that looked beautiful online.

When it arrived, you realised it didn't fit.

Would you keep buying accessories for it simply because you had already paid for the dress?

Of course not.

You would accept the information and make a better decision from there.

Relationships are more emotional than shopping, of course.

But the principle still matters:

Past investment should not force future investment.

What matters is whether the relationship is worth continuing now.

When It Is Time to Walk Away

Walking away does not always require a dramatic betrayal.

Sometimes you leave because the relationship consistently does not meet your needs.

You may need to seriously consider stepping away when:

- Your core relationship goals are incompatible.
- There is repeated dishonesty.
- Your boundaries are consistently ignored.
- You repeatedly feel confused, anxious, or emotionally unsafe.
- The person refuses to communicate about important issues.
- Words and actions consistently contradict each other.
- You keep waiting for behaviour that never changes.
- You are constantly negotiating against your own standards.
- The relationship requires you to become someone you don't want to be.
- You are attached primarily to potential rather than the person in front of you.

And if there is controlling, threatening, abusive, or coercive behaviour, this is not a situation where you need to “communicate better” or climb the Ladder more carefully.

Your safety comes first.

Seek appropriate support and prioritise getting to a safe place.

Walking Away Does Not Mean You Failed

This is especially important for women who have been taught that a successful relationship is one you manage to keep.

It isn't.

A relationship ending does not automatically mean you chose badly.

Sometimes you chose with the information you had.

Then you learned more.

And you made a wiser decision.

That is not failure.

That is growth.

You do not need to stay with someone simply because you once believed the relationship could work.

You are allowed to update your decision when new evidence appears.

This is one of the reasons the Dating Investment Ladder™ is not a one-way staircase.

You can move down.

You can pause.

You can step away.

The goal is not to reach Commitment at all costs.

The goal is to reach the right level of investment based on reality.

The Four Choices

When you evaluate your relationship, you will often find yourself facing one of four choices.

1. CONTINUE

The evidence is encouraging.

There is consistency.

There is growing compatibility.

Intentions are becoming clearer.

The relationship is moving forward naturally.

Your action: Continue getting to know the person and allow investment to grow at a healthy pace.

2. CLARIFY

There is enough potential to continue, but something important remains unclear.

Your action: Have the conversation instead of guessing.

3. SLOW DOWN

Your feelings are moving faster than the evidence.

Your action: Stop increasing investment while you gather more information.

4. WALK AWAY

The relationship repeatedly conflicts with your values, needs, safety, or long-term direction.

Your action: Accept the information and release the relationship rather than trying to force compatibility.

There is no prize for choosing “Continue” when “Walk Away” is the healthier decision.

And there is no shame in choosing “Slow Down” when everyone around you thinks you should be falling harder.

You are the person who has to live with the decision.

Your Dating Investment Ladder™ Decision Check

Before moving to the next level, ask:

1. What do I know?

What have I actually observed?

2. What has been demonstrated consistently?

Look for patterns, not isolated moments.

3. What remains unclear?

Identify the questions you still need answered.

4. Are our intentions aligned?

Not perfectly identical—but directionally compatible.

5. Am I investing because of evidence or because of hope?

6. If nothing changed from here, would I still want this relationship?

7. What is the healthiest next move?

- Continue
- Clarify
- Slow down
- Walk away

You don't have to answer every question perfectly.

You simply need to be honest.

You Don't Need to Be Cold to Be Discerning

Intentional dating is sometimes misunderstood as becoming emotionally detached.

It isn't.

You can be soft and discerning.

You can be romantic and wise.

You can enjoy the butterflies without handing them the steering wheel.

You can hope for the best while paying attention to what is actually happening.

You can believe someone has good qualities without deciding they are automatically right for you.

And you can care about someone while recognising that the relationship isn't working.

That is emotional maturity.

The goal isn't to protect your heart so aggressively that nobody can reach it.

The goal is to give your heart a better decision-making partner:

your discernment.

The Dating Investment Ladder™ was never designed to tell you exactly how many dates to go on, how quickly to fall in love, or when a relationship must become official.

It gives you something more useful:

A way to make decisions without letting attraction make every decision for you.

You know how to recognise evidence.

You know how to look for consistency.

You know how to ask for clarity.

You know how to evaluate compatibility.

And now, you know what to do when the evidence tells you to continue, clarify, slow down, or walk away.

There is only one piece left.

You need to take everything you've learned and turn it into your own intentional dating strategy.

Because knowing what healthy dating looks like is useful.

But knowing what *you* want, what *you* will accept, and how *you* will pace your investment is where everything starts to change.

In the final chapter, we'll turn the Dating Investment Ladder™ into a practical 30-day Intentional Dating Plan—so you can stop dating on autopilot and start making decisions with greater clarity, confidence, and self-respect.

Ready for the next chapter?

Chapter 7

Your Intentional Dating Plan

You now know how to recognise the difference between attraction and compatibility.

You know why consistency matters.

You know how to have conversations about intention.

You know how to notice when your emotional investment is moving faster than the evidence.

And, perhaps most importantly, you know that you are allowed to continue, clarify, slow down, or walk away.

But there is one final shift.

You need to stop treating intentional dating as something you only remember when a relationship becomes confusing.

Instead, make it your normal approach to dating.

Because the goal is not to become better at fixing bad dating situations.

The goal is to become better at choosing relationships from the beginning.

That starts with getting clear about yourself.

Before You Choose Someone, Know What You Are Choosing

One of the easiest ways to lose yourself in dating is to focus entirely on evaluating the other person.

“Does he like me?”

“Is he serious?”

“Does he think I'm attractive?”

“Will he choose me?”

Those questions are understandable.

But they put you in the position of waiting to be selected.

Intentional dating asks a different question:

“Do I want to choose this person?”

You are not simply being interviewed for the role of someone's girlfriend or wife.

You are also deciding whether someone deserves access to your time, energy, emotions, body, plans, and future.

That doesn't make dating a competition.

It simply means you remember that you are choosing too.

Step 1: Define What You Actually Want

Before you can recognise alignment, you need to know what alignment means for you.

Take a few minutes and complete these sentences:

At this stage of my life, I want a relationship that is...

Write freely.

Don't write what sounds impressive.

Don't write what your parents, friends, church, social media, or society expects.

Write what you genuinely want.

Then complete:

I am dating because...

The kind of relationship I want to build is...

Marriage is important to me because...

I want a partner who...

I want our relationship to feel...

The kind of woman I want to be in a relationship is...

These questions may seem simple.

They are not.

Clarity about what you want makes it much easier to recognise when a relationship is taking you somewhere you don't actually want to go.

Step 2: Separate Standards From Preferences

You don't need a list of 50 requirements.

You need to understand what actually matters.

Create three categories.

My Non-Negotiables

These are qualities or conditions that are essential for you to feel that a relationship is healthy and compatible.

Examples might include:

- Honesty
- Respect
- Emotional maturity
- Shared relationship intentions
- Faith or values alignment
- Desire for marriage
- Desire for children
- Financial responsibility
- Respect for boundaries

Your list will be personal.

My Preferences

These are things you would enjoy but could potentially be flexible about.

For example:

- Height
- Profession
- Specific hobbies
- Communication style
- Personality type
- Social preferences
- Particular lifestyle interests

Preferences matter.

They simply shouldn't automatically outrank character and compatibility.

My Deal-Breakers

These are behaviours or circumstances you know you cannot build a healthy relationship around.

Be honest here.

A deal-breaker should be something meaningful—not simply something that annoys you.

The purpose of this exercise is not to create an impossible checklist.

It is to prevent you from discovering your most important standards only after you are emotionally attached.

Step 3: Decide How You Want to Pace Your Investment

Remember the core principle:

Your emotional investment should increase ONLY as evidence increases.

That principle applies to more than feelings.

It can apply to:

- Time
- Emotional energy
- Physical intimacy
- Availability
- Future planning
- Exclusivity
- Introducing someone deeply into your personal life
- Making major decisions around the relationship

This doesn't mean creating artificial rules such as:

“I won't text him first.”

“I must wait three days before replying.”

“I won't show affection until date number seven.”

Those are dating games, not intentional dating.

Instead, ask:

“Is the level of access I'm giving consistent with the level of trust that has actually been established?”

That is a much healthier question.

Step 4: Use the Dating Investment Ladder™ as Your Checkpoint

At any point in a relationship, ask:

LEVEL 1 — INTEREST

“I like this person.”

Your job is simply to notice attraction.

You don't need to create a future yet.

LEVEL 2 — EXPLORATION

“Let me get to know this person.”

Your job is to learn.

Pay attention to character, communication, lifestyle, values, and how they treat people.

LEVEL 3 — EVALUATION

“Are we actually compatible?”

Your job is to compare what you are learning with what you genuinely want.

LEVEL 4 — INTENTION

“Are we both looking for the same kind of relationship?”

Your job is to have honest conversations.

Don't rely entirely on assumptions.

LEVEL 5 — INVESTMENT

“Has this person demonstrated enough to justify deeper emotional investment?”

Your job is to look at consistency, trust, compatibility, and demonstrated character.

LEVEL 6 — COMMITMENT

“Are we intentionally building the same future together?”

Your job is no longer simply deciding whether you like each other.

You are deciding whether you can build together.

And remember:

The Ladder is not a race.

You do not get extra points for reaching Commitment quickly.

The goal is not to climb as fast as possible.

The goal is to climb when the evidence supports it.

Step 5: Stop Trying to Turn Potential Into Proof

This deserves one final reminder.

Potential is not proof.

A man may have enormous potential.

He may be intelligent.

He may be ambitious.

He may have a good heart.

He may say that he wants to change.

He may tell you that he plans to become more serious.

He may genuinely believe everything he tells you.

But your relationship still has to be based on the person who is actually showing up.

You can encourage someone.

You can support someone.

You can believe in someone.

But you cannot build a relationship with someone's potential.

You build a relationship with a person.

So when evaluating someone, ask:

“If this person never changed from who they are today, would I still choose them?”

That question can be uncomfortable.

It can also be incredibly freeing.

Step 6: Have the Conversations That Matter

Intentional dating doesn't mean interrogating someone.

It means being willing to discuss important things when the relationship reaches the appropriate stage.

You may eventually need to discuss:

- What each person wants from dating
- Exclusivity
- Marriage
- Children
- Faith
- Money
- Career ambitions
- Location
- Family expectations
- Gender roles
- Communication
- Physical intimacy
- Lifestyle
- Conflict
- Boundaries

You don't need to cover everything during one serious conversation.

Relationships unfold.

Let the conversations develop naturally.

But don't deliberately avoid important subjects because you are afraid the answers might change your feelings.

Information that changes your decision is still valuable information.

Step 7: Pay Attention to How You Feel Around the Relationship

This doesn't mean every healthy relationship feels peaceful every second.

You can be nervous.

You can have disagreements.

You can feel vulnerable.

You can experience uncertainty while getting to know someone.

But pay attention to your overall experience.

Do you generally feel respected?

Can you express yourself?

Can you ask questions?

Do you feel like you have to perform to keep their interest?

Are you constantly analysing messages?

Are you frequently anxious about where you stand?

Do you feel that you have to become smaller, quieter, easier, or less demanding to keep the relationship?

Your emotional experience doesn't automatically prove that someone is wrong for you.

But it deserves your attention.

Sometimes your discomfort is not anxiety that needs to be suppressed.

Sometimes it is information that needs to be explored.

Your 30-Day Intentional Dating Plan

Now let's turn everything into action.

You don't need to overhaul your dating life overnight.

Use the next 30 days to become more intentional.

Week 1 — Get Clear

Your first week is about you.

Write down:

- The relationship you genuinely want
- Your non-negotiables
- Your preferences
- Your deal-breakers
- Your relationship goals
- The kind of partner you want to be

Then ask yourself:

“What patterns have I repeated in past relationships or dating situations?”

Don't use this exercise to shame yourself.

Use it to become more aware.

Maybe you repeatedly ignore early inconsistency because you don't want to seem demanding.

Maybe you become attached before asking important questions.

Maybe you confuse chemistry with compatibility.

Maybe you stay too long because you don't want to feel like you failed.

Whatever you discover, approach it with curiosity.

Awareness gives you something to work with.

Week 2 — Date Differently

If you're actively dating, spend this week practising observation.

Don't become cold or overly analytical.

Simply become more present.

Notice:

Does he follow through?

Does he respect my boundaries?

Does he show genuine curiosity about me?

Can we have meaningful conversations?

Do I enjoy who I am around him?

Are his actions generally consistent with his words?

And when you feel yourself getting very excited, ask:

“What do I actually know at this point?”

Enjoy the connection.

But stay connected to reality.

Week 3 — Evaluate

This is your evidence week.

Choose the person you're currently dating—or, if you're not dating anyone, think about your most recent dating experience.

Write down:

What I know

List what you have directly observed.

What I believe

List what the person has told you.

What I assume

List the things you have mentally filled in yourself.

This exercise can be surprisingly revealing.

You may discover that some of your strongest beliefs about the relationship are based on very little actual evidence.

Then complete your Dating Investment Ladder™ Check:

What level am I currently at?

What evidence supports that level?

Am I investing above the level of evidence?

What do I still need to learn?

Is there a conversation I need to have?

Week 4 — Decide

The final week is about making a decision.

Not necessarily a dramatic relationship decision.

A clarity decision.

Choose one:

CONTINUE

The relationship is showing healthy progress.

CLARIFY

You need an important conversation before deciding what comes next.

SLOW DOWN

Your feelings or investment have moved faster than the evidence.

WALK AWAY

The relationship repeatedly conflicts with your needs, values, safety, or direction.

You may feel emotional about your choice.

That's normal.

Clarity doesn't always feel comfortable.

Sometimes the right decision still hurts.

Your Final 30-Day Question

At the end of the 30 days, ask yourself:

“If nothing about this relationship changed over the next six months, would I still choose it?”

Don't answer based on who you hope the person will become.

Answer based on who they are now.

If the answer is yes, that tells you something.

If the answer is no, that tells you something too.

And if you don't know yet, that's okay.

You may simply need more evidence.

That's the beauty of intentional dating.

You don't have to force an answer before you're ready.

Protect Your Heart Without Closing It

There is a temptation, after experiencing disappointing relationships, to become extremely guarded.

You tell yourself:

“I will never trust anyone again.”

“I won't get attached.”

“I'll watch every move.”

“I'll make sure he proves himself before I care.”

But that is not the goal.

A completely closed heart cannot experience the intimacy it wants.

The goal is not to stop caring.

It is to stop over-investing before you have enough information.

You can remain hopeful.

You can enjoy romance.

You can be affectionate.

You can let someone get to know you.

You can allow yourself to fall in love.

Just don't abandon your ability to observe.

A soft heart and strong discernment can exist in the same woman.

Your Intentional Dating Checklist:

Before giving a relationship more of your emotional investment, ask:

- ☐ Do I genuinely know this person, or am I mostly imagining their potential?
- ☐ Are their words and actions generally aligned?
- ☐ Have I seen consistency over time?
- ☐ Do they respect my boundaries?
- ☐ Can we have uncomfortable conversations?

- ☐ Do our important relationship goals align?
- ☐ Do I like the person they are today?
- ☐ Am I becoming more attached than informed?
- ☐ Have I communicated the things that matter to me?
- ☐ Am I choosing this relationship from clarity rather than fear of being alone?
- ☐ If nothing changed, would I still choose it?

If several answers make you uncomfortable, don't automatically panic.

Pause.

Look again.

Have the conversation.

Gather more information.

And then decide.

You Don't Need to Date More. You Need to Date More Intentionally.

You don't need to become an expert at reading every man's mind.

You don't need to decode every text.

You don't need to predict the future.

You don't need to make yourself perfectly desirable so someone will choose you.

You need to become more intentional about who you give your time to, what you pay attention to, what you ask, what you accept, and when you increase your investment.

That is what the **Dating Investment Ladder™** gives you.

It reminds you that attraction can start the process, but it should not control the process.

It reminds you that potential is not proof.

That words matter, but patterns matter more.

That clarity is not desperation.

That slowing down is not playing games.

That walking away is not failure.

And that commitment should be built by two people who are intentionally choosing the same direction.

You can date with an open heart without dating blindly.

You can want marriage without rushing into the first relationship that looks promising.

You can be hopeful without ignoring evidence.

And you can want deeply to be loved without accepting a relationship that consistently leaves you confused about where you stand.

So as you move forward, remember the principle at the heart of this entire guide:

Your emotional investment should increase as evidence increases.

Let attraction get your attention.

Let curiosity help you explore.

Let observation reveal compatibility.

Let honest conversations create clarity.

Let consistency build trust.

And let mutual intention earn deeper investment.

You don't need to force the relationship to become what you want.

You need to pay attention to what it is becoming.

Because the right relationship is not simply one where someone wants you.

It is one where you both want the same kind of future—and your actions consistently move in that direction.

That is what dating with purpose looks like.

YOUR INTENTIONAL DATING TOOLKIT

The Dating Investment Ladder™ is designed to help you think differently about dating.

But knowing the framework is only the beginning.

The pages that follow are designed to help you use it in real life.

You don't need to complete everything in one sitting.

Come back to these tools whenever you meet someone new, feel yourself becoming emotionally attached, need clarity about a relationship, or simply want to check whether your dating decisions still reflect what you want.

Remember:

You are not trying to predict the future. You are learning to make better decisions with the information you have today.

TOOL 1

Dating Investment Ladder™ Worksheet

Where Am I Right Now?

Think about the person you are currently dating—or a recent dating situation if you are currently single.

Person I'm evaluating: _____

How long have we known each other? _____

How would I describe our current relationship?

Circle Your Current Level

1 — INTEREST

“I like this person.”

2 — EXPLORATION

“Let me get to know this person.”

3 — EVALUATION

“Are we actually compatible?”

4 — INTENTION

“Are we both looking for the same kind of relationship?”

5 — INVESTMENT

“Has this person demonstrated enough for deeper emotional investment?”

6 — COMMITMENT

“Are we intentionally building the same future together?”

Why did you choose this level?

What evidence supports your current level?

List what you have actually observed.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

What remains unclear?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

My next move

- ☐ Continue
- ☐ Clarify
- ☐ Slow down
- ☐ Move up
- ☐ Step back
- ☐ Walk away

Why?

Remember

Do not move up the Ladder simply because you have strong feelings. Move up because the relationship has demonstrated enough to justify deeper investment.

TOOL 2

The Evidence Check™

When feelings become strong, it can become difficult to separate what you know from what you hope.

Use this page whenever you notice yourself becoming emotionally attached.

WHAT I KNOW

What have I personally observed?

WHAT HE HAS TOLD ME

What has he directly communicated about himself, his intentions, values, or future?

WHAT I AM ASSUMING

What am I filling in because I hope, expect, or imagine it to be true?

WHAT I STILL NEED TO LEARN

The Reality Check

Complete this sentence:

“If I removed my hopes and looked only at the evidence, I would say...”

TOOL 3

Compatibility Check

Not every difference is a problem.

Not every similarity means compatibility.

Use this checklist to explore the areas that could significantly affect your future together.

Area	Me	Him/Partner	Alignment
Relationship goals	_____	_____	☐ High ☐ Medium ☐ Low
Marriage	_____	_____	☐ High ☐ Medium ☐ Low
Children	_____	_____	☐ High ☐ Medium ☐ Low
Faith/values	_____	_____	☐ High ☐ Medium ☐ Low
Family expectations	_____	_____	☐ High ☐ Medium ☐ Low
Money/finances	_____	_____	☐ High ☐ Medium ☐ Low
Career	_____	_____	☐ High ☐ Medium ☐ Low

Location/lifestyle _____ _____ ☐ High ☐ Medium
☐ Low

Gender roles _____ _____ ☐ High ☐ Medium
☐ Low

Communication _____ _____ ☐ High ☐ Medium
☐ Low

Conflict style _____ _____ ☐ High ☐ Medium
☐ Low

Physical intimacy _____ _____ ☐ High ☐ Medium
☐ Low

What matters most to me?

Choose your five most important compatibility areas:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Where do I see possible differences?

Which differences can we reasonably work through?

Which differences could become serious problems later?

A difference is not automatically a deal-breaker. But an important difference deserves an honest conversation before deeper investment.

TOOL 4

“Am I Investing Too Soon?” Self-Check™

Complete this whenever you feel yourself becoming deeply attached.

PART A — REALITY CHECK

How long have I known this person?

How much do I genuinely know about him?

- ☐ A little
- ☐ Some
- ☐ A lot

How much of my view is based on what I've observed?

- ☐ Mostly evidence
- ☐ A mixture of evidence and assumptions
- ☐ Mostly hope/potential

Have we discussed relationship intentions?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ No

Do his actions generally match his words?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ No

PART B — MY CURRENT INVESTMENT

Rate yourself:

Area	Low	Medium	High
Emotional attachment	☐	☐	☐
Time spent	☐	☐	☐
Mental energy	☐	☐	☐
Physical intimacy	☐	☐	☐
Future expectations	☐	☐	☐
Availability	☐	☐	☐
Exclusivity expectations	☐	☐	☐

Now ask:

Is my investment level higher than the evidence currently supports?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ Yes

PART C — MY LADDER CHECK

I believe we are currently at Level: _____

The evidence supporting this is:

The next thing I need to know is:

MY NEXT MOVE

- ☐ Continue
- ☐ Ask a question
- ☐ Have a clarity conversation
- ☐ Slow down
- ☐ Reassess
- ☐ Step back

TOOL 5

The Continue / Clarify / Slow Down / Walk Away Decision Page

When you feel stuck, use this page instead of endlessly replaying the situation in your head.

CONTINUE

I may continue when:

- ☐ The relationship is becoming clearer.
- ☐ There is consistent effort.
- ☐ We are learning more about each other.
- ☐ Our important goals appear compatible.
- ☐ I feel respected.
- ☐ My emotional investment is reasonably supported by evidence.

CLARIFY

I may need a conversation when:

- ☐ I don't understand what the relationship is becoming.
- ☐ We haven't discussed an important expectation.
- ☐ Something has changed.
- ☐ His words and behaviour seem unclear.
- ☐ I am making assumptions instead of asking.

SLOW DOWN

I may need to slow down when:

- ☐ My feelings are moving much faster than the relationship.
- ☐ I am imagining a future that hasn't been discussed.
- ☐ I know more about his potential than his actual patterns.
- ☐ I am giving relationship-level access without relationship-level clarity.
- ☐ I am ignoring things because I don't want to lose him.

WALK AWAY

I may need to step away when:

- ☐ Our core relationship goals are incompatible.
- ☐ My boundaries are repeatedly ignored.
- ☐ There is repeated dishonesty or manipulation.
- ☐ The same damaging pattern continues without meaningful change.
- ☐ I constantly have to abandon my standards to keep the relationship.
- ☐ I don't like the relationship I am becoming inside this relationship.

My decision:

I choose: _____

Because: _____

YOUR INTENTIONAL DATING DECLARATION

I will not confuse attraction with compatibility.

I will not mistake potential for proof.

I will not give relationship-level investment to a relationship that has only demonstrated dating-level evidence.

I will ask questions instead of creating stories.

I will pay attention to patterns instead of isolated moments.

I will allow people to show me who they are.

I will communicate what matters to me.

I will not abandon my standards simply because I am afraid of losing someone.

I will remain open to love without abandoning discernment.

And I will remember:

I am not only waiting to be chosen. I am choosing too.

YOU'RE NOW READY TO DATE WITH PURPOSE

You now have more than a list of dating tips.

You have a system.

You know what you want.

You know what to look for.

You know what questions to ask.

You know how to distinguish evidence from assumption.

You know how to pace your investment.

And when the time comes, you know how to decide whether to continue, clarify, slow down, or walk away.

The Dating Investment Ladder™ gives you one principle to return to whenever dating becomes confusing:

Your emotional investment should increase as evidence increases.

Let that principle guide you.

Because the goal isn't to date perfectly.

The goal is to date intentionally.

A FINAL WORD FROM MIKKY

Dating can be exciting.

It can also be confusing.

There will be moments when you feel certain, moments when you question everything, and moments when you wish someone could simply tell you whether a relationship is going to work.

No guide can do that.

But you can become better at making decisions with the information available to you.

You can ask better questions.

You can recognise patterns earlier.

You can communicate more clearly.

You can slow down when your emotions are running ahead.

You can walk away when something consistently does not align.

And you can remain hopeful without becoming careless with your heart.

My hope is that you leave this guide not feeling more afraid of dating, but more equipped for it.

You don't need to approach every new person with suspicion.

You simply need to give your investment time to catch up with the evidence.

Date with an open heart.

Choose with a clear mind.

Let consistency earn deeper access.

— Mikky Olayinka

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mikky Olayinka is a Lifestyle and Relationship coach committed to helping women navigate modern-day lifestyle and relationship demands.

Through practical, thoughtful guidance, Mikky focuses on helping women approach relationships with greater self-awareness, clarity, confidence, and intention.

Her work is rooted in a simple belief:

You can want love deeply without losing yourself in the process of finding it.

Dating With Purpose was created to help women move away from confusion, guesswork, and premature emotional investment—and toward a more intentional way of understanding the people they date and the relationships they build.

DISCLAIMER

This guide is provided for educational and informational purposes only. It is intended to support personal reflection, communication, and decision-making around dating and relationships.

It is not a substitute for professional mental-health, medical, legal, financial, or other qualified professional advice.

Every relationship and individual circumstance is different. The examples, questions, frameworks, checklists, and suggestions in this guide are general tools and should be adapted to your personal circumstances, values, needs, and boundaries.

The Dating Investment Ladder™ is a decision-making framework, not a guarantee that a relationship will lead to marriage, long-term partnership, or any particular outcome.

No framework can predict another person's behaviour, intentions, or future decisions.

You remain responsible for your own choices and decisions.

If you are experiencing abuse, threats, coercion, stalking, violence, or feel that your physical or emotional safety is at risk, prioritise your safety and seek appropriate professional, emergency, or trusted-person support rather than relying solely on the strategies in this guide.

Above all, remember that you do not have to remain in a relationship simply because you have already invested time, emotion, money, or hope into it.

Your safety, wellbeing, values, and personal boundaries matter.

Use this guide as a tool for greater clarity—not as a substitute for your own judgment.