

A Life in the Day: The matchmaker playing Cupid to London's high society

Hayley Bystram, 46, is the founder and managing director of Bowes-Lyon Partnership, an elite matchmaking agency based in Mayfair and Surrey. After working as a wedding planner in her twenties, she transitioned into the dating industry in 2006, before founding her own agency three years later. She lives in Surrey with her partner Lee and three children.

I can only relax when I get to work. Before that, it's wrestling the kids in the morning to get them out of bed and into their school uniforms. I've got a frenetic hour and a half between waking up and getting everyone out the door where it's just me pouring coffee into my eyeballs. I used to find a half hour in the mornings for a Joe Wicks session, but that was 2024 Hayley – it needs to be 2025 Hayley. My kids are four, eight, and 11, so right now my home life feels like work more than my work life, though everyone says that parenting only gets harder from here.

My agency has two offices, in central London and in the Surrey Hills, so I try to do two days in the Surrey office, two days working from home, and one day in London. I love having my London fix in our office just off Piccadilly Circus and then coming home to fields and cows. Both my home and the office are in Gomshall, the village where they filmed part of *The Holiday*, which is a weird little bubble – it's a chocolate box place, but lots of big global companies are based there as well.

I don't have time to do matchmaking full time and also run the company, so now I only work with about four clients directly each year – it used to be about 50. The first thing I'll do each day is phone my clients, where I'll learn how their date went from the weekend, or talk about their holidays. Sometimes being a matchmaker is like being a PA. They'll say things like, "I'm at the airport. I've just heard it's really great snow in Courchevel, so I'm going there." We're like, "Great, what about the date you had scheduled?"

If I'm in the office, then I'll also brainstorm with the other matchmakers. I try to meet everyone personally who signs up to the agency, so sometimes I'll come up with ideas the other girls may not have thought of. Some of my greatest matches have been done on a throwaway comment, where someone's talked about something silly, like a theatre production one lady had really enjoyed – I'd had a conversation with a gentleman about that exact performance, but they hadn't been considered as a match on paper before. It was a lightbulb moment.

Lee and I met through a friend of a friend, which is how people should meet each other, rather than on dating apps. He's a firefighter, so we couldn't be more different in terms of our jobs, though we

both help people, I suppose. I don't think you need to be stapled at the hip to someone with the exact same hobbies and interests as you.

When I was a wedding planner, I would decide in my head if I thought the couple were going to last, based on the way they talked to each other and if they made mountains out of molehills about things like napkins. I'm a good matchmaker because I like to understand people more deeply – their values, their future aspirations, the qualities that are important to them. The questions we ask our members are not the same questions that you will find on the dating apps.

After the kids go to bed, I have about an hour to myself, which I use to doom scroll. Reading about current affairs and politics does help me understand my clients better, since they're often involved in the events themselves. Once, we were trying to match an MP with someone who worked in the oil and gas market, but I'd read an article about the politician working on a big project to do with energy reserves around the North Sea. We couldn't match them because the date could look like a conflict of interest.

I really struggle to be present at home, especially when I know clients are going on dinner dates that night, at places like Le Colombier in Chelsea or the Dorchester (though mine's normally a nice gastropub in the Surrey Hills). I have to force myself to switch off, especially if I know one client on the date is really nervous.

Everything I do comes down to logistics and planning, as a working mother. People seem to struggle with logistics these days in dating too, and don't want to seem too forward or too pushy. That's why we have rules and guidelines; the gentlemen contact the ladies first, we're very old school. I'm not worried about needing to modernise or about dating apps, because what we do works.

Best advice I was given My grandfather told me that I was allowed to say no to things

Advice I'd give Believe in your own intuition, abilities, and skills

What I wish I'd known It really does all work out fine!