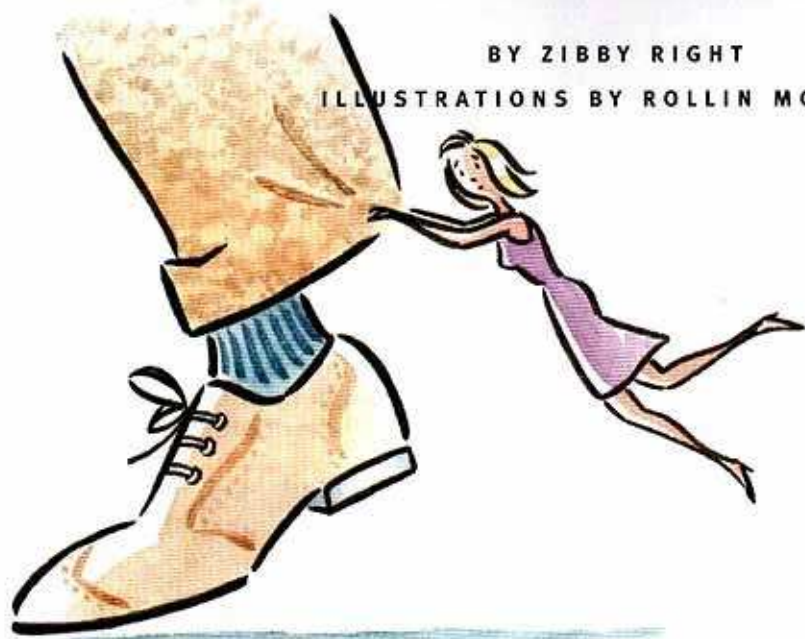


HOW TO DATE AN INVESTMENT BANKER

BY ZIBBY RIGHT

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROLLIN MCGRAIL



I SHOULD'VE KNOWN. BACK WHEN my husband, Andrew, and I were "just friends" and section mates at Harvard Business School, he decided to pursue an investment banking career. Even after witnessing his stuck-in-the-office-again lifestyle as a summer associate, I still gleefully started dating him. I didn't even consider what it would be like to date someone who spent more hours at work in a given week than I spent awake. I just jumped right in.

You'd think I would've been more prepared for his all-nighters, unpredictable schedule, canceled plans, and constant sleep deprivation. It's no secret that bankers work notoriously long hours. Slaves to their clients and the next big deal, bankers are simply required to sacrifice their personal lives in exchange for lucrative salaries and exciting careers.

After the first six post-MBA months of only seeing Andrew when he got home at

night (usually after I'd gone to sleep) and when he got ready for work in the morning, I started getting a little concerned. Would it be like this forever?

"Deals have a life of their own," said my dad, a lifetime investment banker. "That's just part of the game."

True, I thought. But bankers aren't the only players. What about all the spouses and significant others of these brave night owls, burning the midnight oil in the interest of billion-dollar mergers? Would marrying a partner at a big bank mean losing one at home? I decided to do some research.

According to Bryan Robinson, Ph.D., in his book, *Chained to the Desk*, families that include a workaholic have higher divorce rates than those that do not. "Mates of workaholics feel alone as partners and parents," he writes. "They feel unimportant and minimized, even innately defective, because they get so little attention from their workaholic partners."

While not all bankers are official workaholics, that didn't sound too promising.

Following are some well-earned survival tips from wives and girlfriends at all levels of the classic banking hierarchy (analyst, associate, vice president, managing director, CEO) and a few from me that I wished I'd learned a long time ago. (Note: no male counterparts to female bankers were interviewed given the predominance of male bankers. Certainly male spouses face these challenges, too.)

Have your own life. Being independent and having your own, full life is absolutely essential to a successful relationship with a banker. Take advantage of the freedom to do things you love.

"The best part of his long hours is that I can make plans with girlfriends without feeling like I'm ditching him," says one woman, whose fiancé moved from associate to VP at a leading investment bank. Plan fun activities and stay involved with your own career and outside interests.

Be flexible. "Getting used to canceling plans was a big adjustment for me," one girlfriend admits. "He would get so busy that we would cancel on people all the time, and I would just feel so guilty. After a while, I stopped planning dinners with other couples, especially during the week. I've gotten more used to 'playing it by ear,' and always set the precedent that we might not be able to come."

Brooke Neidich, whose husband, Daniel, retired as a managing director from Goldman Sachs after 25 years (for 23 of which they were married) told me that her trick to making it work was eating dinner together whenever possible, no matter

how late. If her husband left the office at 10:00 p.m., they still went out and enjoyed a nice meal after the kids were asleep.

Stay in touch. "One way that helped me deal with (my husband's) long hours was to speak to him on the phone late in the evenings when he could chat more easily," says a wife of an associate at a private equity firm. "We use Instant Messenger a lot, too. It tends to be less distracting and enables him to answer whenever he can."

"Get your own Blackberry," a wife of a VP suggests. "It works wonders."

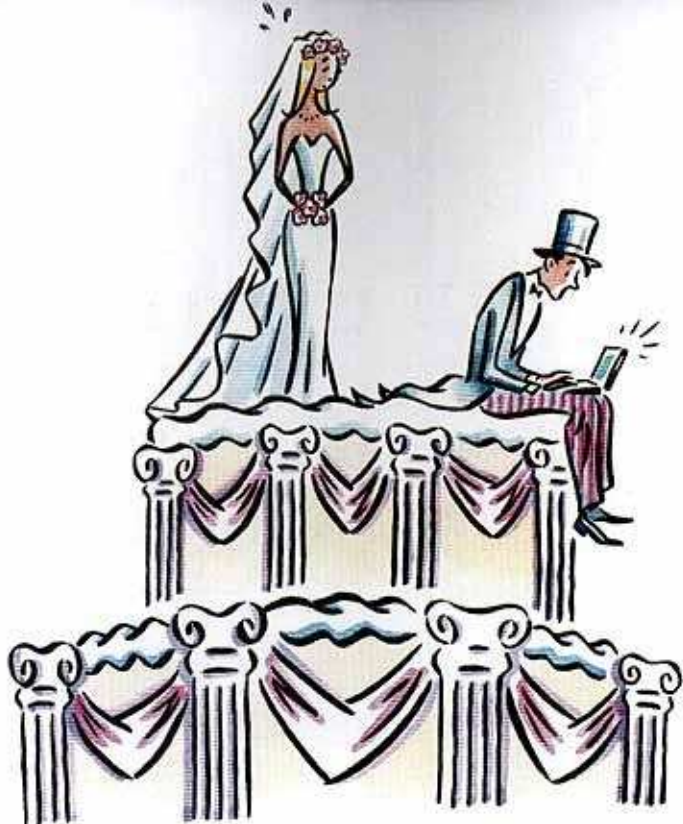
With this in mind, I try to meet Andrew for a quick coffee break near his office during particularly grueling stretches. Even 10 minutes together can help.

Be patient. Brooke Wood, whose boyfriend is an analyst, has already learned this time-honored trick: "I always bring a book to every meal because half the time he doesn't show up."

I've learned that investment banking actually has its own time zone: half an hour late. When Andrew actually gets out on time, I'm pleasantly surprised.

Travel with miles. Vacations are a real sore spot for many banking partners since so many trips get canceled or postponed due to the lack of control bankers have over deal flow. Planning vacations "way ahead of time" and "forewarning his colleagues months in advance, reminding them as the vacation time gets closer and closer," can help, one wife reports.

We book all our airline tickets with easily refundable miles—just in case.



Be understanding. "I would say I've gone solo to half the out-of-town weddings that I've been invited to in the past three years," one wife reports. "But I try to be understanding, because at least I get to go and be with friends! He's the one stuck at the printer's or in the office."

The wife of a former summer associate says, "You have to support them and empathize with their situation; it's equally unpleasant for them."

"Being a banker is tough," another adds. "Late hours, tough personalities to deal with, and many deadlines. (My husband) usually doesn't want to be stuck at work, either. If he complains, I tell him it'll pay off in the end or that he'll get through it."

Don't sweat the small stuff. "Life has some very important moments," says Susan Solomon, whose husband, Peter, is the Founder and Chairman of Peter J. Solomon Company, a leading independent investment banking firm. "But only some are crucial. You don't ever want them to miss your kid's soccer game or school interviews, but there will always be another dinner party and you can always get theater tickets again."

While there may not be that much time together, "remember to enjoy your relationship," Mrs. Solomon adds. "And just have fun together. As you get older, you learn to have more of a sense of humor and wit about these things. You can get into more of a rhythm. It's not that the work gets that much easier, but you learn to laugh more often. Life is made up of so many highs and lows, and you learn that life just goes on."

As for me, if we end up having a daughter and she grows up and marries a banker, too, I promise I'll write her a whole book about it. ♦

