

a minute WITH...

Barb Elgin Lesbian Relationship Coach

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Summerfield, Fla. | When Barb Elgin realized her post-graduate career as a social therapist had hit a plateau in 2000, she decided to overhaul her career and focus on her own community. Coach Sappho was born.

Elgin, a lesbian who lives near in the Ocala area, decided the GLBT community needed a coach to help with relationships, and she found herself specializing in lesbian courtships and long-term relationships.

The certified life, career and relationship coach has clients from around the country and has even been a featured speaker with national organizations like the Human Rights Campaign. Elgin took a minute between coaching sessions to share her thoughts on love and relationships with *Watermark*. To reach Elgin, visit CoachSappho.com or call her at 866-396-2272.

How did you come up with the name Coach Sappho?

I saw how similar coaching was to therapy, which I had done for so long, and decided to put coaching together with the lesbian icon of Sappho. I wanted to focus primarily on lesbian woman, so it just made sense.

How do you communicate with your clients?

I have clients from across the country, so I coach most of them over the telephone. Technology has made this career so much more user-friendly than it was in the past, and I found there was a need—regardless of location—for women to find their own way as individuals and in same-sex relationships.

You said you focus on lesbians—is there really that much difference between a lesbian couple and a gay male couple?

Oh god, yes! I don't want to exclude my gay brothers or offend anyone, but women are raised differently and our biology is different. We interact differently than gay male couples or straight couples. One of the big differences is the "U-Haul Phenomenon," which is the biggest lesbian stereotype that people seem to recognize. We can laugh at that name, but we know it's true. Lesbians seem to be more relationship-focused than men.

But that's not to say that gay men can't have relationships, right?

Of course. There are many men in loving long-term relationships with their partners. But women, just in our evolution, are more nurturing and want that in a relationship. I think it's safe to say that there are more gay men who have sexual relationships outside their partnerships that don't break

up their relationship. Most lesbians are focused more on monogamy and can't handle infidelity of any kind.

You said women face that "U-Haul Phenomenon." Does that mean lesbians don't date?

I think most people don't know *how* to date, even straight people. The biological idea is to pair off quickly, but I feel at my core that you have to balance your head and your heart, which is very hard. When you first meet someone, we're biologically wired to jump in the sack and act like bunnies for six months. There's really no rulebook for dating.

What do you tell women who say they just can't find love?

I don't tell them anything, but I coach them to figure out what that feeling is about. They have to challenge that thought, and until they have someone challenge it for themselves, they will continue to believe it. It helps if that person hears success stories of people who used to feel the same way. It can be so frustrating, and it's a huge issue in our community.

What do you think is the key to a successful relationship?

Each relationship is different. I've been in two long-term relationships: one for seven years, and most recently I came out of a 14-year relationship. But the key is to have a strong self. You have to ask yourself if you are really happy with who you are instead of projecting bad feelings on your relationship. If you're unhappy, it could be something with your career or that you're not doing something you enjoy. I call it the "Luscious Lesbian Triangle"; it's made up of You, Me and Us. All three of those



components have to be successful in order for the relationship to work.

How do you find that right person?

I always suggest hanging out in venues where there are people in line with who you are—it can be a spiritual place, a politically active climate or a professional circle. In those areas you are more likely to meet someone who shares your values. That's one of the biggest problems in relationships is that those values are too far apart. It just won't work if you want to have a long-term relationship.

What about the theory that opposites attract?

Love is a mystery, and there are lots of mysterious pieces to it. If you have a couple in a long-term relationship and those people seem very different, there is probably a strong chemistry on an emotional or physical level. I think that the longer you are with someone, the more you tend to value that person and that relationship. You're more attached, obviously, and you've built this life that you want to preserve. | • |