

How to date if you're a CEO — five bosses share their horror stories

How do you know your next date isn't just after your money — or your business secrets? Rohan Banerjee meets five execs navigating a romantic minefield



Rohan Banerjee | Thursday May 08 2025, 5.00am BST, The Sunday Times



Dating as a CEO is difficult and the top of the corporate ladder can be a fretful, lonely place. There are the obvious pressures of running a company and finding time for love amid a calendar that's chockful of unromantic appointments. And when it comes to meeting that new special someone, there are some serious trust issues to overcome — the nagging thought that your new suitor might be a gold-digger, the delicate matter of asking a date to sign a nondisclosure agreement or, much later, a prenup. A bad relationship might not just break hearts, it could damage reputations and profits.

The modern dating landscape is dominated by apps, but many of these are unsuitable for business leaders who wish to keep a low profile or who don't have the time to sift through hundreds of matches. "The apps are less a lottery than they are a minefield," one executive from a company in the FTSE 250 tells me. "You're taking a risk with your time, your reputation and potentially your company's reputation."

Some might resort to flirting at a conference or the gym, but this can often be viewed as inappropriate — a cancellable offence even.

Others prefer to outsource their romantic endeavours. Michelle Begy is the founder of Ignite Dating, a matchmaking agency for "high-calibre, professional singles", which counts numerous lovelorn CEOs among her clients. They come to her because they find the "dating pool incredibly limited". For £7,200 to £24,000 a year, a client can expect about six introductions during that time.

Begy's clients include divorcees and "chronically single" people whose professional success hasn't translated to their personal lives. "When you've built significant wealth or influence, the question of motive often arises," Begy says. "Are people drawn to them for who they are or for what they have?"

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Here five business leaders share their experiences of dating at the top of the corporate tree.



Timothy Armoo, 30, former CEO of Fanbytes and angel investor

In 2017 I co-founded a marketing agency that helped big brands such as Nike and Samsung reach Gen Z via social media influencers. In 2022 the company was sold for eight figures. I've since started a diverse investment portfolio. I was in a long-term relationship with someone I met at university but we broke up amicably last year. I took some time out to be single and learn more about myself.

Now I'm actively dating. I have used apps such as Hinge and Raya, but I quickly lost faith in algorithms. Apps feel superficial and transactional. People's profiles rarely offer up the insights I'd actually want to know.

There is a pervading idea among entrepreneurs that dating is a distraction. I disagree. Finding the right partner can be a cheat code to life. If you can manage it, you've got someone to really connect with and to share in the ups and downs. They can be your partner in crime or even just your sounding board when you need it most.

I don't tend to signpost that I am a successful entrepreneur, at least not early on. Some people, particularly if they don't work in a similar sort of space, can start to feel self-conscious. They start treating the date like a job interview or acting like they have something to prove.

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Timothy Armoo: "I'd like to be with someone who is an independent thinker"

I don't want my dating life to always start off with work. I spend so much of my time thinking about work, it would be good if my being with someone was really focused on our shared interests.

I've tried to be proactive in my approach to dating. I wouldn't say I was manufacturing meet-cutes per se, but I'm always willing to have a conversation with someone in an environment that I like being in myself. That could be at the gym or as part of a Hyrox or Ironman challenge. It could be at a business conference or at a personal development retreat. I don't think of talking to someone as too forward, it's just taking an initiative when the apps aren't delivering.

I've had some good dates and I've had some horrible ones. On one occasion, when my phone had run out of battery, I asked my date if I could borrow hers to clarify the address of a restaurant. When I opened Google, her most recent search was about my net worth. I ended the date immediately.

On another occasion a woman had remarked on the watch I was wearing. I was initially impressed and excited when she identified the correct brand and model, as watches are a big interest of mine. I thought we might have something in

Dating as a CEO isn't just difficult because people can be opportunistic or insincere. I'm self-aware enough to admit that some people just might not gel with my habits or preferences for how to do things. But it's also difficult simply because of time pressures. A typical week for me can involve doing a talk in New York, flying to Kenya to oversee an investment and returning to London for a meeting. Couple this with my need to be always "on" and I can see why partners would find this hard to adapt to. I don't think what a CEO wants is radically different to what other people want. I'd like to be with someone who is an independent thinker and emotionally intelligent. Their job doesn't matter to me.

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Sabrina Stocker, 29, CEO of Two Comma PR

As an entrepreneur I've always been fiercely independent and ambitious. I've never worked for anyone other than myself. I've founded an events company, a retail software company and a marketing agency. In 2018 I got to the semi-final of series 14 of *The Apprentice*.

In addition to having appeared on TV, I have a visible online presence. I've had thousands of unsolicited messages on social media — everything from poems and love letters to flexed biceps photos from the gym. A man I briefly dated, introduced to me by a friend, had trawled through my Instagram posts, media appearances and interviews to research me in unsettling detail. He deliberately engineered meetings by attending events he knew I'd be at, learnt about my interests to feign common ground and built an entire persona around what he thought I wanted. It wasn't romantic, it was creepy and calculated.

For a time I was so focused on my goals that everything, consciously or not, was measured by how it aligned with where I was heading in business. I wanted to be fully present in relationships, to let things unfold naturally, but at the same time I was working with publicists who suggested that dating a *Love Island* star would be great for my optics.



Sabrina Stocker: "I love going on activity-based dates"

I've dated men who were quick to diminish what I do, suggesting I shouldn't work or that my work wasn't as important as theirs. There's still a deep-rooted belief that success looks different on a woman — that ambition should be softened.



I'm currently in a relationship with a man who is ten years older than me, which comes with a welcome level of calm and maturity. I met him at my friend's baby shower, while I was hosting a cacao ceremony.

Before that my approach to dating was strategic. Your partner is the most important decision you make, so you need to get it right. I've always avoided dating apps in the main, although I've had plenty of fake profiles made on my behalf. I've then had people message me on Instagram, thinking they had been speaking to me, when really they'd been catfished.

In terms of who I'm attracted to, it's less about what they do or how much they earn, and more about whether their values and lifestyle align with my own. I'm not someone who can just sit still, watch Netflix and hang out in the same pub every weekend. I look at dating in stages: maybe a hot drink or a walk to begin with, something low-investment in terms of time and energy. If there's a connection, then it can progress to dinner.



I love going on activity-based dates. Sports are ideal because they offer a natural talking point and I get my exercise in at the same time. Some of my favourite date days are cooking with food bought from a farmers' market or going to beekeepers' events. I'm also really into escape rooms. I used to have a rule that if a guy and I couldn't work together to escape a room, we probably weren't going to work in a relationship either.

In terms of my schedule, I rely heavily on my personal assistant. She is amazing and organises everything in my Google Calendar, including time for getting ready and travel. But when it comes to the date itself, I like my man to plan it.

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Jay*, forties, CEO in the aviation industry

I was previously married and had an on-off relationship with someone I truly loved but decided to call it off last year when she refused to address her short temper. I've been single since, using apps such as Hinge intermittently. More recently I've used a matchmaking agency.

While I love my job and remain hugely ambitious — I'm very clear on my two-year, five-year and ten-year plans — I can acknowledge that this laser focus also makes it hard for me to switch off. A problem, I've found, is that many of my interests are directly linked to what I do for work. I'm obsessed with planes.

More seriously, because of my seniority and the oversight I have, I do need to take calls round the clock. This can be hard for partners to accept. Harder still is the fact I can't share the contents of those calls with them, as I deal with sensitive information. Even if they don't understand things, the risk of them repeating them within earshot of the wrong person is actually a big issue. It's not that I don't want to share — in fact I'd love to be able to bounce ideas around with someone I love and trust — but it's that I can't.

I remember giving a talk at a conference a few years ago. I got applause from a thousand people, but back in my hotel room what I wanted was a hug.

Dating later in life is different to when I was a young man. I don't think my eating and drinking habits have changed all that much. A Michelin-starred meal is great occasionally, but I'm just as content with a few pints of Guinness and some chicken wings in a pub. There may have been an inflated expectation from some of the people I've gone on dates with as to the kind of thing we should be doing. Money's great, don't get me wrong, but I'm not flash. Sometimes I think people wish I was.

If I loved someone I'd happily pay for everything. It's not important what a partner does for a living. I know some CEOs talk about the importance of being challenged by or competing with their partner, intellectually or professionally. I'm just concerned with whether we share interests, values and can support each other.

My dating malaise is probably better characterised by short-term relationships simply fizzling out rather than a series of horror stories. But I do have one particularly unfortunate experience. I went on a date with a younger woman, whom I met through an app. She was very attractive. However, she arrived visibly intoxicated and, I suspect, on some sort of drug. It would have been a very bad look for me to leave her to her own luck, so I paid for a hotel room nearby and let her sleep it off. She insisted it was fine for me to join her in the room but I disagreed. I ended up staying downstairs in the lobby, in plain view of the CCTV cameras, while she got herself together.

I couldn't contact her friends or family as I didn't know them. The next day she claimed I'd got her drunk then embarrassed her by rejecting her advances. I

I'm currently in a headspace that is a bit more comfortable with being single than in the past.

** Name has been changed*

Liz Taylor, 69, Liz Taylor Consultancy

After organising a couple of themed nights for the Midland Hotel in Manchester in 1986, I realised I had a knack for this sort of thing and started my own company. Now I'm co-ordinating parties, weddings and conferences, sometimes for thousands of people.

My love life doesn't match up, however. I've been married three times. The first time was a disaster. I was 21 and we were divorced within 18 months. My second marriage gave me my two kids, so that's positive at least. He was a deeply religious Jewish guy, and for a time I tolerated the whole milk and meat scenario, but that, mixed in with some other issues, led me to leave.

I got married for a third time eight years later and we were together for 22 years. When we split up it left me with a lot of trust issues. But I know I am still in a great position. I've got a fantastic social life and amazing friends. I'm always travelling, going to shows and eating out. I don't have any issues filling my Saturday nights. It's Sunday morning when I'd like to be asked, "So, what did you think of it?"



Liz Taylor: "I've found that men can get terribly jealous"

For the past few years I've had a casual on-off relationship with a guy, which is great, steamy fun when we're in the same city. But he has also got his own business and neither of us want to give up what we've built. Aside from that, I can't say I'm actively dating right now. I get flirted with a lot, but when it comes to it, guys don't follow through. Men can find me intimidating. The problem is that a lot of the traits that make me good at my job – I'm obsessed with details and never shy away from giving feedback – are things that can put partners off.

Truth be told, I am a classic girly girl in many ways. I'm a sucker for romance. I would love a Richard Gere type to climb up a ladder to my bedroom window, bring me flowers, wine and dine me, and hold the door open. When I am on a date I'm old-fashioned. I like the man to take the initiative so I can give the boss lady persona a bit of a break.

But as important as being swept off my feet is being taken seriously. I'm an accomplished businesswoman and I need a partner to respect that, maybe even celebrate it. I've found that men can get terribly jealous. While I could take a back seat on choosing the restaurant or the movie, I couldn't give up my work.

There are some days when I love being single and others when I don't. I don't think my ideal partner is wildly unrealistic. I want a man my own age who is kind and has a good sense of humour. It is crucially important that he can laugh at himself. But I don't want a toyboy – funny or not.

I don't need someone to buy me things. I can buy stuff for myself. However, I would like someone to talk with, to compare notes on life with and to feel safe with.



Robert*, sixties, CEO in the automotive manufacturing industry

I started my business when I was 18. By my mid-twenties I was employing about 20 people. By the time I was 35 I had a staff of 70. Now the workforce is more than 100. I suppose I've been a CEO from the get-go, but being the CEO of yourself is very different to leading a company.

someone in your sixties, when you've already both had a life and developed your habits and opinions, can be tricky.

I have a busy schedule but what free time I do have I would love to share with someone. Still, I would sooner stay alone than end up with the wrong person. I think that dating apps have deteriorated over the past few years. They are full of AI bots – and even some of the real people on them are pretending to be something they're not. I had one date with a woman who was at least 30 years older than her profile picture suggested.

Personally, I'm not too bothered by what my partner does for a living. The most important thing is that we share values and interests. However, I am naturally going to be drawn to someone who has similar life experiences and hobbies, which could be linked to where they are in their career.

I want to be with someone who does enjoy the same sort of restaurants as me, or who, at the very least, wouldn't be overwhelmed by them or feel the need to post about them constantly on social media. I've worked hard for my money and want to be able to use and enjoy it without being judged.

I had one relationship end, in part, because the woman I was with was uncomfortable with what I spent on my children's education. She also didn't like that some of my friends spent as much on their clothes as she did on her car. I think that was unfair.

Recently I've been using a matchmaking agency to meet people. I don't have much opportunity to meet someone on the fly. It has helped me to meet professionals who are perhaps a little further away from my local area, but who are more likely to have things in common with me. I'm at a stage in life now where I'm clear on what I want and need.

**Name has been changed*

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