

Phase One: Object–Fantasy

The Beginning: When Sue Meets Joe

Sue meets Joe at a conference she attends for human resource managers. She sits next to him in a morning session on coaching managers with difficult employees. She finds Joe to be an attractive, friendly man. They compare notes and opinions about the presenter and subject matter throughout the training session. After the session they decide to have lunch together. During the meal, they discover they have many mutual interests, both personal and professional. They both enjoy working with managers who are having difficulty getting their employees to perform at satisfactory levels. They both

enjoy spending time outdoors, walking or bicycling, and prefer these activities to those that require a lot of money or time with crowds. The lunch ends. Since they are going to attend different sessions in the afternoon, they decide to exchange business cards to keep in touch.

Sue drives home excited. She had noticed that Joe didn't wear a wedding ring. While this doesn't conclusively mean he is single and available, Sue decides that he probably isn't married. He was very attentive and seemed interested in what she had to say. She hopes that Joe was interested in her socially as well as professionally. She makes up all kinds of conclusions as to who Joe is in a matter of a few hours. The list includes kind, friendly, smart, physically active, concerned about the environment, attentive, a good listener, very attractive, interested in her, available for a relationship, funny, well-educated, and a lot of fun to be around. While Sue rationally understands that she has just met Joe and doesn't know him well, she's sure that the qualities she saw in him during the time they were together are very real and true. She feels there is a lot of potential and can't help but fantasize about a future with Joe. She waits to see if he'll contact her.

But when Joe doesn't contact her the following week, she begins to worry and feel sad. She feels a sense of loss. While on the one hand, she knows she hasn't known Joe long enough to really *lose* him, she feels a loss nonetheless.

The Beginning: When Joe Meets Sue

Joe notices Sue right away when he enters the training session and purposely sits down next to her. He thinks Sue is very attractive and sexy. As they converse, Joe notices she also has a good sense of humor. She appears to be bright and educated. He also can't help but notice she has great legs as she crosses them back and forth under her skirt. Joe had been dating someone for a short time, but that had ended several weeks before the conference, and he feels there just might be some promise in Sue. Joe decides it is worth pursuing and invites Sue to have lunch with him after the training session. He discovers at lunch that they have some things in common, and that she appears to be attracted to him. She laughs at his jokes, shakes her head in agreement when he shares his ideas on human resources

management, and leans toward him when she responds to his questions. She seems to be an independent and secure woman. Joe can't help but fantasize what sex would be like with Sue. He gives her his card after lunch and is pleased when she quickly reciprocates.

On the way home, Joe's thoughts quickly turn toward work and the meeting that is scheduled the next morning with his boss. He wonders what bad news he'll receive. Occasionally, he thinks about Sue. He remembers her smile and the way she brushed her hair away from her face. Her attractiveness is growing on him. Joe's thoughts vacillate between Sue and work as he drives slowly through the rush hour traffic. When he arrives home, he takes Sue's business card out of his pocket and slips it into his wallet.

The next day, Joe meets with his boss. He gets the bad news that the company is downsizing in response to diminishing sales. Joe and the vice president of Human Resources spend the next few hours developing a plan of action. Joe feels overwhelmed. The next few days pass quickly, and although he occasionally fantasizes about getting together with Sue, his primary focus is on work and the horrendous tasks and challenges that lie

ahead of him. He has never participated in this kind of downsizing before and feels insecure about how he will handle it. He is also worried about his own job security.

Another week goes by and Joe feels the need to de-stress and decompress. He needs a distraction from what is happening at work. He thinks of Sue and sends her an e-mail.

The Beginning after the Beginning

In the e-mail he asks her if she would be interested in meeting for lunch one day to talk about the conference and how they were implementing the information into their respective human resource departments. Sue quickly agrees to the lunch meeting, and they schedule it for later that week. Lunch goes well. Sue enjoys Joe's sense of humor and the values he demonstrates in how he talks about his work. They share some of their more challenging situations at work (although Joe doesn't talk about the downsizing) and Sue feels supported by Joe as he offers valuable suggestions. They share things about their histories and families, such as, where they were born, are their parents still alive

and well, how many siblings they have, and where they went to college. Sue feels her attraction to Joe growing stronger. Joe gives Sue a hug when they part.

Sue's excitement is increasing. She is now very attracted to Joe and begins to fantasize about their first kiss. She anticipates his next communication and is anxious to see him again. She hopes he feels the same, thinks he does, but isn't sure and doesn't want to get her hopes too high. She tells her friends how great Joe is and how he possesses all the qualities that are important to her. She says that she genuinely likes Joe and cares about him a lot, even that she feels a special connection. She starts fantasizing about their future together, imagining trips they will take, when they will move in, even how many children they will have. She creates an entire life with Joe in her mind. And while she reminds herself that she has just met Joe, she can't help but dream of the life she has always wanted.

Joe also enjoys their lunch. Sue continues to laugh at his jokes and makes him feel like he's on top of his game. He likes her flirtatious nature and is feeling an even stronger physical attraction. He leaves lunch believing that it was a good call to send her that e-mail and

take a break from the stressors at work. Sue was good company. He sees her as independent, nondemanding, very supportive, and probably good in bed. Once things settle down at work, he plans on calling her and making another date, perhaps dinner at his house.

Let's stop and take a look at what we know:

1. Sue and Joe each believe they know a lot about the other. However, at this point, they only know what they have projected onto each other. They're still both objects upon which they have projected all their fantasies and desires about who they want the other to be. All they really know is what they did or said, didn't do or didn't say. They don't know their respective motivations or intentions. Truth be told, they simply have not spent enough time together to know much at all.
2. Sue has experienced Joe in a certain way. How Joe really is remains unknown. Her interpretations of Joe's actions and words are based on many factors—her wants and

desires, her fantasies and past, her experience with others who behave similarly to Joe, and to some extent, what Joe wants her to know and see. The same goes for Joe with regard to how he experiences Sue.

3. Joe and Sue feel a sexual attraction to each other. They each interpret the attraction differently. Sue sees a special connection between the two of them. Joe thinks Sue will be good in bed. At this point, dopamine, the hormone of attraction, is beginning to surge. Dopamine gives us the feeling of well-being and sexual attraction. It is physiologically driven, not person driven, although certain people will trigger this hormone more than others. This hormone also plays a role in making us believe we know someone more than we do. Joe and Sue don't know that dopamine is affecting their perceptions and judgments.
4. Sue says she cares about Joe, but really she cares about continuing to feel the way she does when she's around him. In turn, Joe

feels good about himself when he's around Sue. He's sure that Sue is the reason he feels so good. And while they may care about each other as fellow human beings, this caring is on a superficial level. They cannot possibly care about each other in a deep and profound way because they have not established any real intimacy. They are still in the throes of phase one.

5. Both Sue and Joe are carefully selecting which aspects of themselves they want to reveal. While Sue may be genuine in her responses, her responses to Joe are colored by her need to look good to him, rather than on how she truly feels. Joe also wants to look good, so in turn he presents himself as charming and together, not wanting Sue to know how stressed out and insecure he's feeling at work.
6. Sue is responding to Joe as if all of her projections were the truth and isn't conscious that she's doing this. Her fantasies and hormones have taken hold. Although she is

somewhat aware that she doesn't know Joe all that well, she is still reacting as if her personal interpretations and projections belong to Joe and not to her.

7. Joe thinks he is relating to Sue as a person, but in actuality, most of his behaviors and thoughts of Sue are sexually driven. He believes that Sue admires him, and this fuels his desire to have sex with her. At this point, Sue may be more of an object designed to make him feel like a man and satisfy his sexual needs rather than a real person who has needs of her own.
8. Lastly, Sue and Joe cannot help but do all of the above. It is a natural and normal phase in the development of relationships.

Welcome to the dance. Phase one has just begun.