

## Career focus: Recruiter for love

**Level:** Intermediate upwards

**Timing:** 90 minutes plus

**Material needed:** One copy of the worksheets and Vocabulary record per student

**Group size:** Any

### Overview

This lesson plan for both pre-experience and in-work business students is based around an original article first published in *Business Spotlight* Issue 1/2010. At first glance it may seem that it is about relationships and matchmaking, but when looking closer you will see that it is about providing a professional service, implementing a particular type of business model in a field where it may not be expected, using personal and business skills learned elsewhere in a different kind of business, and today's fast-track business life.

The tasks in the student worksheets will encourage the students to not only learn and use new business vocabulary and related functional language but also to practise useful business skills such as note-taking and summarizing.

The teacher's notes aim to provide suggestions for teaching and learning strategies as well as ideas on how to present the tasks in the classroom, any necessary answer keys and follow-on extension tasks and lesson plans. The article is in American English.

### Introduction

The article is about Sophia McDonald, originally from Moscow, now a US citizen. Sophia explains how she uses skills and experience that she gained in her previous professions as a political campaign consultant and real-estate broker to build up, and make a success of, a business that offers a very different kind of service.

### Warmer

Introduce the topic by asking the students to decide what they think a matchmaker is. After they have decided and you have given them the correct answer, ask them to list the personal and business skills that they think a matchmaker should possess. If they need help and inspiration, suggest that they skim the article to find out which are mentioned.

#### Key:

1. *b*

2. Possible answers:

According to the article, being a good networker and keeping in touch with people is essential, as is being able to empathize with your clients. "Understanding people and teaching others to know themselves is her key to success". Being able to ask questions and obtain information is useful, as is knowledge of how computerized databases work.

### Find the business words

The crossword will enable the students to understand the meaning of key words used in the article. Turn this into a collaborative task by allowing the students to work in pairs or groups of three.

#### Key:

##### Across

4. *contractual obligation*

5. *challenges*

8. *rigorous*

9. *well-read*

10. *real-estate broker*

##### Down

1. *mandatory*

2. *sophisticated*

3. *recruiter*

6. *referrals*

7. *pre-screened*

### Idiomatic expressions

In this task the students should look for idiomatic expressions (not only one word) in the article. The paragraph number will help them. It's not essential for the answers to be given word for word in the way that they are in the article. Instead, encourage the students to write the expressions in their infinitive form, e.g. where in the article it says: *Sophia McDonald has been fixing people up for ...*, the students should try to write the answer as: *to fix people up*.

#### Key:

1. *to fix people up*

2. *to stay in touch with somebody*

3. *to have a knack for something*

4. *to click with somebody*

5. *to close a deal*

6. *to cover the cost of something*

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### Teaching and learning strategy: Idiomatic expressions

An idiom is a phrase where the words together have a meaning that is different from the meaning of the individual words. Because of this difference in meaning, idiomatic expressions can be difficult for students to understand. However, idioms hold a great interest for many learners as they bring richness and colour into the language.

Sometimes idioms have equivalents in the learners' own languages – this is an example of when translation in the classroom really makes sense as it makes the new expressions easy to learn. Other times, even if there are no equivalents, their meaning can be accurately guessed at from the context.

The bad news, however, is that idiomatic expressions may have no equivalents in the learner's L1, may not be able to be deciphered from the context, and may have strong cultural origins which the learners might have no knowledge of. For example, English is full of slightly obscure, culturally-linked sporting idiomatic phrases such as *a bit of a sticky wicket*, and *saved by the bell*.

On the whole it is best if the students only learn idioms that will be useful to them and which their interlocutors are likely to understand. Encourage students to learn them in the same way they would other vocabulary in that they write the expression into a sentence of their own invention (and which has relevance to them or their work) and make sure they notice which prepositions most often follow the expressions, e.g. 'stay in touch' *with* someone.

There are many free online resources which learners can have fun browsing through. These generally offer idiomatic expressions and give their meanings – some are listed alphabetically, some are grouped into themes. Take a look at these fun articles on idioms from the Your English section of onestopenglish:  
[www.onestopenglish.com/idioms](http://www.onestopenglish.com/idioms)

### Note-taking and summarizing

After the students have skimmed the article twice for tasks 2 and 3, give them time to read through it quietly by themselves. Encourage them to ask about anything they still do not understand. After having read through the article they should make brief notes – if possible just key words – about the main content.

When they have done this, ask them to compare their notes with those of another student. In doing so they will be able to see if they have missed any important points and will also be able to judge how much of the article their partner understood and what may have been misunderstood.

After they have compared and added to their notes, ask them to turn the page over so that they can no longer

read the article. Working in pairs and taking turns to speak, they should retell the article to each other using only their notes.

Remind students that orally summarizing articles, reports, presentations, etc. in this way is a useful business skill.

### Talking points

Ask the students to discuss these two questions in small groups. When you notice that their conversations are naturally coming to an end or that they are struggling for something to say, stop the conversations and ask for class feedback.

### Extension

If, and only if, you think it is appropriate, you could ask whether they know of anyone who has tried finding a partner through an agency, online site or newspaper advertisement and what their experiences were.

### Writing

The task requires the students to think about Sophisticated Matchmaking's USP (unique selling proposition) and what kind of people it is targeting. If you think it would be helpful, you could brainstorm these points and write them on the board to open up a way into the writing part of the task. Encourage the students to be creative but also remind them not to forget that this is a serious business which needs marketing and advertising in the same way that any other business does.

This task can be done using paper and pens or a PC. The only limitations are the time you have available and the students' imaginations.

### Vocabulary record

Here students should be encouraged to record all the new and useful vocabulary they have learned during the lesson, not only in the form presented in the article but also in related forms.

### More on careers

For follow up lessons on the same or related topics go to the following lesson plans in the Business Skills Bank and the Business tasks series on onestopenglish:

Chance and opportunity: <http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?catid=59913&docid=156546>

Experience: <http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?catid=59913&docid=155482>

Marketing essentials: <http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?catid=58032&docid=144623>

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### Introduction

The article is about Sophia McDonald, a businesswoman from the US. Sophia explains how she uses skills and experience that she gained in her previous professions as a political campaign consultant and real-estate broker to build up, and make a success of, a business that offers a very different kind of service.

### 1 Warmer

1. What is a matchmaker?
  - a. Someone who makes matches for lighting fires.
  - b. Someone who brings people together for relationships.
  - c. Someone who organizes sports events.
2. What personal and business skills do you think a matchmaker should possess?

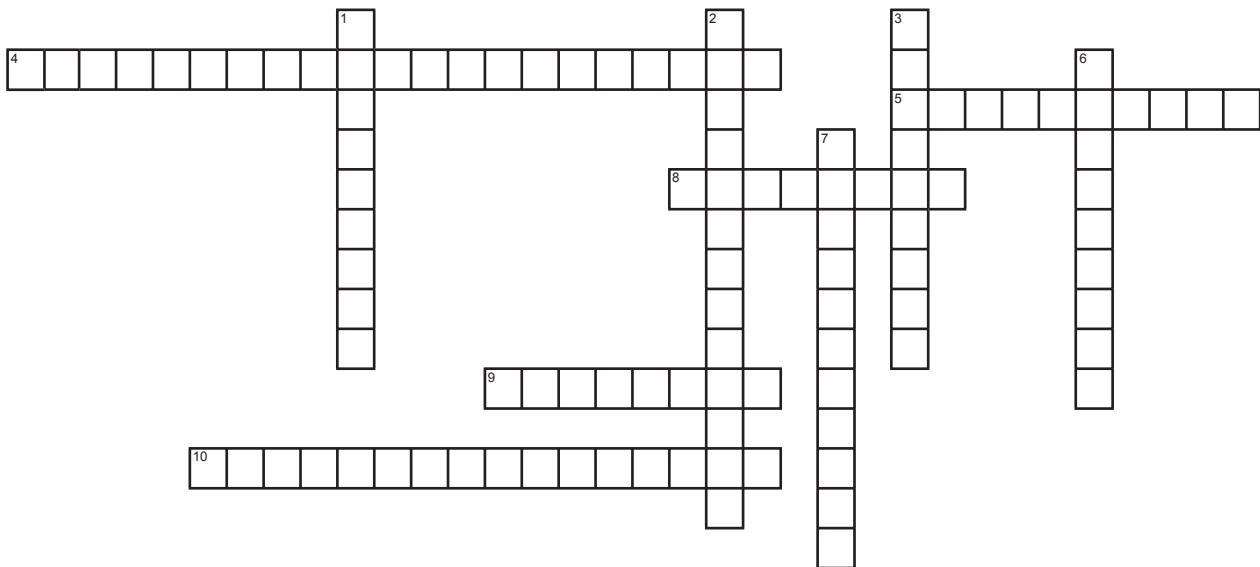
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### 2 Business vocabulary crossword

The words needed to complete the crossword can be found in the article. The number of letters and the paragraph numbers are given to help you.



#### Across

4. something that you must do because it is written into a contract you have signed (11+10, para 11)
5. \_\_\_\_\_ are tasks that need a lot of skill, energy and determination to deal with or achieve (10, para 1)
8. thorough and careful (8, para 11)
9. someone who is \_\_\_\_\_ has read many books and has a lot of knowledge (4-4, para 8)
10. someone whose job is to buy, sell or rent property for the owner of the property (4-6+6, para 2)

#### Down

1. ordered by a law or rule (9, para 7)
2. knowing and understanding a lot about a complicated subject (13, para 1)
3. someone whose job it is to get someone to work in a company or join an organization (para 2)
6. the process of sending someone to another person or place for help, information or advice (9, para 4)
7. to get information before you decide whether someone is suitable for something (3-8, para 6)

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### 3 Idiomatic expressions

Find idiomatic expressions in the article that have the following meanings.

1. to arrange a meeting or date between two people (para 1)

\_\_\_\_\_

2. to keep in contact with somebody (para 2)

\_\_\_\_\_

3. to have a special talent for doing something (para 3)

\_\_\_\_\_

4. to get on with somebody and understand them and their way of thinking (para 3)

\_\_\_\_\_

5. to bring negotiating to an end by reaching an agreement (para 4)

\_\_\_\_\_

6. to pay the expenses of something (para 7)

\_\_\_\_\_

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by Lisa Foster

Matchmaking can mean different things to different people. Many choose a direct and structured approach. Sophia McDonald, however, tells Lisa Foster that she believes in emotional intelligence.



1 Sophia McDonald has been fixing people up for as long as she can remember. But she didn't become a professional matchmaker until 2007. The 36-year-old Moscow native started her own company, Sophisticated Matchmaking, the same year. The road to this was born out of many things, even heartbreak. "My own personal experiences, such as moving to the US and the challenges that came with it, were what got me into relationships and the matchmaking business," she says.

2 A former political-campaign consultant and real-estate broker, McDonald has lived in the US since 2000 (an American ex-husband is what took her overseas). She describes herself as a "recruiter" for husbands, wives, boyfriends and girlfriends. "I cannot tell you the exact number of success stories I've had in creating lasting relationships. Most people don't stay in touch with me after they meet someone," she explains. "But I can tell you that, last month, I created four happy couples. I got this feedback in emails from my clients."

3 McDonald says she started her business "because I have a knack for knowing who'd work well together as a couple. But I have to be honest," she adds. "If I don't click with people, I can't do my job well and I won't take them on as clients."

4 A background in selling high-priced houses in the Seattle area has also been helpful. "When I was in real estate, I was a super networker – connecting and keeping in touch with hundreds of people a month. My database was growing daily; I talked to people everywhere I went – parties, stores, coffee shops, gas stations – always adding new people to my database. I learned the importance of building relationships and working by referrals only," she explains. "I also did coaching for top sellers and found that those who closed the most deals were not necessarily the hardest-working, but rather the ones who valued the importance of relationship building. The same is true for my matchmaking business."

5 While McDonald's clients range in age from their 20s to their 70s, the majority are men and women in their late 30s and early 40s. This is the age when most people who haven't married and had children start to panic, she says. McDonald serves clients in the Seattle area, though she will work with people in other locations.

6 Most of her clients find out about her from her website, or have heard about her in the local media. While professional matchmaking is quite expensive – some people have paid as much as \$50,000 to find a life partner – McDonald allows pre-screened people to join her database free of charge. This means they can go out on a date with a paying client, although they cannot request any matchmaking services themselves.

7 What makes her service different from online dating services such as Match or eHarmony? Sophisticated Matchmaking is more expensive, but McDonald believes it is also more effective. Online dating sites typically charge a monthly or three-month fee of between \$50 and \$100; yearly fees are often around \$300. McDonald's fees vary widely, depending on the client's wishes, but a onetime charge of \$395 is mandatory for all new clients. This covers the costs of an extensive three-hour interview as well as a detailed questionnaire.

8 "I'm more than just an MLS-type database of singles," McDonald says. "I don't just ask people about their hobbies or favourite travel destinations. Everybody seems great on paper – confident, attractive, active, well-read, etc. But if you're so wonderful, why are you still single?" she asks.

9 "I offer a three-step approach to help clients evaluate their past relationships and identify particular patterns. Online dating sites don't do this. At the same time, I help clients refresh their appearance and help them set personal relationship goals," she adds. McDonald's intense questioning digs deeply into her clients' past liaisons and why they failed. She also gets a lot of information about people from the way they describe their families.

10 "Sometimes I have made people cry, but my only intent is to help people be more self-aware and face their fears. I believe relationships are about how two romantic partners act in life's prickly situations. I encourage people to focus less on physical criteria and common interests, and more on a potential partner's relationship skills or emotional intelligence." Understanding people and teaching others to know themselves is her key to success.



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11 In addition to the rigorous three-hour interview, she regularly fixes people up on dates, offers seminars on dating, and parties for singles. All these are available for varying fees. Thanks to the current financial situation in the US, the most popular services are “dating à la carte” and the dating and relationship seminars. “Dating à la carte is paying for one introduction at a time. There is no annual fee or contractual obligation this way,” McDonald explains. “It has proven to be quite popular.”

#### A closer look

**MLS** stands for “Multiple Listing Service,” a computerized database of the properties for sale by real-estate brokers in a particular area. Houses sold by private individuals (known as “For-Sale-By-Owner properties”) are not included.

By using the MLS system, brokers hope to find buyers more quickly than if they were working alone. The system is mainly used in the US and Canada, but it is also spreading to other countries.

#### Sophia McDonald

**Date of birth:** March 1, 1973

**Nationality:** Russian-born, naturalized US citizen

**Current position:** founder and CEO of Sophisticated Matchmaking, Inc. ([www.sophisticatedmatchmaking.com](http://www.sophisticatedmatchmaking.com)), Mercer Island, Washington state

**Work experience:** real-estate broker, public relations, marketing, political campaign consultant and coordinator

**Education:** master’s degree in political science from Moscow University; certificate as a professional matchmaker from the Matchmaking Institute, School of Matchmaking and Relationship Science, New York City

**Languages:** Russian, English, French, Spanish and Japanese

**Hobbies:** spirituality, energy studies, quantum physics, meditation, reading, hiking, wine, traveling, meeting people

**Relationship status:** divorced; mother of Rainer, aged eight

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#### 4 Note-taking and summarizing

Make notes about the most important points of the article. Compare your notes with those of another student. Take turns to summarize parts of the article. *Start: Today we read an article about ...*

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### 5 Talking points

- Compared to 50 years ago, do you think it is easier or more difficult for professional business people to find a life-partner these days?
- In which ways (beyond simply finding a partner) do you think a business such as Sophia McDonald's helps business people?

### 6 Writing

In paragraph 6 we read that: *Most of her clients find out about her from her website, or have heard about her in the local media.* Think about the services the company offers. What is its USP? What type of clients does it want to target (age, income, profession, etc.)? What experience does the company director bring to the service? Write a one-page advertisement for Sophia's business, Sophisticated Matchmaking, for a local newspaper or magazine.

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### Vocabulary record: Career focus: Recruiter for love

verb	noun	adjective (+ opposite)	adverb (+ opposite)
recruit			
	matchmaker		
			romantically
	referral		
		computerized	

Vocabulary record

