



▼ Left - Fred and the Staff at the First Dates restaurant. Right - Fred on Michelle Roux Jr's show, Service, in 2011.



10 TIPS FROM THE LOVE GURU

FRED SIRIEIX, TV'S FIRST DATES MAITRE D'

FIRST DATES has become one of Channel 4's biggest hits.

It's a simple recipe - singletons meet up at London restaurant Paternoster Chop House looking for dinner and, they hope, love!

Keeping an eye on everything is maitre d' Fred Sirieix, 42, who (off-screen) is general manager of Michelin-starred Galvin at Windows restaurant.

Charismatic Fred, who has two children Andrea and Lucien, has become a huge viewers' favourite - and is also seen as a bit of a love guru.

Here, he shares his 10 lessons on love and life.

I just love being there when the magic happens

GO WITH GUT INSTINCT

I worked on Michel Roux Jr's BBC2 show Service and one of the producers asked me to take part in First Dates.

I wanted to check that they had good intentions and when I was assured of that, the heart was there - I was happy to do it right away.

I think that often your first feeling is right. It has become a must-watch because love is something we can all relate to and no-one is put on the show looking for them to fail.

IT'S ALL ABOUT TRUST

Love and life in general is all about trust. I'm a very trusting person and that's important in relationships.

Without trust there is nothing. You go through life and sometimes people disappoint you but you can't set out not to trust.

I have that faith, although it doesn't stop me from being hurt when you're let down. When that happens you have to just take it on the chin and keep going.

MAKE SOMEONE FEEL SPECIAL

Everything stems from that unconditional love you get from your parents.

I have been very lucky in that respect and that they taught me the importance of integrity and honesty.

I also learned from them that making people feel special is vital - and I try to do this in both my hospitality work and life.

My mum and dad were nurses. My mum always said I was lucky to be working with people when they were having a good time, while she worked with them when they were in pain.

I remember my dad telling me about a patient so scared he had the blanket pulled up so only his eyes were showing. My dad made a connection with him and he could see a smile spread from his eyes and the fear of death vanish.

FOLLOW YOUR HEART

My dad would have loved me to be a doctor but my heart wasn't in it.

When I went to one of France's top catering colleges when I was 16 I did really well and knew then that's what I wanted to do. That was my calling.

I kind of feel a bit like a doctor anyway as the maitre d' of a restaurant!

WATCH AND LEARN

Most times I can tell immediately which couples are going to hit it off. It's not instinct - it's knowledge.

I've been working in this hospitality environment for 25 years now and I can call on everything I've seen.

I spend all my time looking and listening to people and seeing how

they behave. It's always the good dates that stick in my mind, never the bad.

One of First Dates' very first episodes featured dancer Frankie and this guy Muhala. I remember them eating olives and I just loved the way they were getting on together. There was an energy between them and I could see a connection right away.

And then there were the two girls Jo and Naomi. As soon as I met them individually I knew it was going to work out. They had the exactly same enthusiasm and I could tell they were going to be good together.

RELAX, THINGS WILL ALL WORK OUT!

I have a new partner and things are going really well between us. I don't feel any pressure because I'm in a series about finding love. I think I'm lucky because I'm quite grounded.

We've all been hurt at some stage. I was in love with a girl at 18 and she broke my heart. I've been broken-hearted several times since but I wasn't ever deterred.



RECOGNISE TRUE LOVE

You don't fully understand love until you have children.

Being a dad is the best thing I have done and the best thing I will ever do. You can't top it.

When my daughter was born I was so scared to hold her in case I dropped her.

The midwife actually pushed her into my arms.

I sat down and held her and kissed her.

It was such a tough learning curve. I took her out in the pram one day and ran straight home with her when she started to cry.

It was so much easier when I had my second child.

SHARE YOUR TIME

Couples come back later to share their stories and tell me what happened next.

Because I was there when the magic happened, they feel they want to tell me, which is just great!

I get this all the time, not just from the series. I was in my own restaurant the other day and four separate couples started explaining how they got together.

It can all be in the first kiss. One woman said she didn't fancy the guy that much until he snuck a kiss and she felt the magic. And another girl fancied an office colleague and they got together when she found the courage to kiss him at a night out.

People see me as some kind of love guru and come to the restaurant just to ask my advice. But usually they just need reassurance.

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

In the Christmas special episode there was an unforgettable proposal between Scott and Victoria.

It was so unexpected. I was talking at the bar and when I came back to reception I saw he was down on one knee and realised he was proposing - with a jelly ring from a packet of sweets.

That's the beauty of First Dates, the fact it surprises and it feels magical when something like that happens.

I still get touched when it works out. People come along for one simple reason - they want to find love, to find that special person.

When we pair them and it works then that's a fantastic feeling.

Scott and Victoria have invited me to the wedding - but I've told them I'm not going if they want me to do the catering!

BE HONEST

About yourself and what you want. If you don't get on with someone, it's not the end of the world. Move on and find someone else.

Love really is everywhere so don't become obsessed.

People are scared and have maybe been traumatised about a relationship failure but sometimes it's all about realising it's not working rather than being worried about being hurt again.

■ First Dates is on Channel 4 on Tuesdays at 9pm.

By Bill Gibb