

Expectation is the leading cause of disappointment

Tips from Dr. Darek Dawda of DAVDA Psychology*



BY MATHILDA WATERS

*Having conflicting emotions is not only a normal but also valuable part of life, according to our expert psychologist, Dr. Dawda of DAVDA Psychology.**

MW: I am frustrated with one of my friends, who, as far as I can see, has everything one might need in life, yet constantly complains it's not enough. Any advice for him?

Dr. DD: It might be useful to tell your friend that expectation is the leading cause of disappointment. Ask your friend to make this sentence his mantra. It is the most obvious thing to say, but if we did not have expectations, we would not be dissatisfied.

MW: Sounds good, but my friend would tell you his expectations are reasonable.

Dr. DD: If in fact they are reasonable, maybe he is not doing enough to realize his expectations; hence the disappointment. Alternatively, maybe he does expect too much.

MW: So essentially you are saying that expectations are in the eye of the beholder?

Dr. DD: Absolutely. Expectations arise when we believe that our needs should be met. The greater we perceive our needs to be, the more inflated our expectations become.

MW: OK. Why does he expect so much?

Dr. DD: Expectations are created in many different ways. Your friend might simply be prone to seeing the cup half empty. Did he always get his way growing up? If we grow up having our every whim instantly gratified, life's inevitable limitations will be very difficult to bear. On a broader scale, our entire consumerist culture artificially raises the bar on our expectations, creating a general sense of emptiness to be filled with ever-new products and lifestyles. Without expanding expectations, the bubble of our consumerist economy could not expand.

MW: So, is the solution to get rid of expectations?

Dr. DD: Of course it is unreasonable to propose that we eliminate expectations altogether. If you wake up without expectations, it probably means you are dead, or more likely that you are very depressed. Expectations drive all our actions.

MW: So how do you strike a balance?

Dr. DD: There is always a discrepancy between what psychologists call the Actual Self and the Ideal Self. This discrepancy is a good thing that drives us to creativity, achievement and growth. The problem is when this discrepancy becomes too large. When it does, two things happen. Emotionally, you live in a constant state of tension between what you have and what you want. And behaviourally, you get paralyzed by this tension, and become less capable of doing what you need to do to. Perfectionists are notorious for procrastination and inability to complete tasks.

MW: So the solution would be?

Dr. DD: The solution is to curb your expectations down, and to stop demanding so much of yourself and others. Drag the perfectionist out of you into the open, and don't let it control your thoughts and actions. Instead, practice gratitude, and be compassionate towards yourself and others. We are all imperfect creatures living in an imperfect world. At the same time, remember that life wants to expand in you. So keep your healthy expectations alive. Continue to participate in making your life more fulfilling, and making this world a better place.

* DAVDA Psychology is a psychotherapy and personal coaching clinic. Visit www.davda.ca for free SLEEP QUIZ with SLEEP TIPS or for more information. To find other Manitoba psychologists, visit www.mps.ca