

ON EXPECTATIONS



The expectations we have in our personal and professional relationships can often become the source of conflict and discontent. This is naturally true for both our clients and for ourselves as coaches. We may “expect” things from other people, and when these expectations are not met, we are disappointed.

UNDERSTANDING EXPECTATIONS

Not having any expectations of anyone for fear of being disappointed seems an unrealistic and disengaged way of going about things. At the same time, it is undeniable that having strong expectations brings with it the unexpected possibility of being let down. The nature of our expectations matters then.

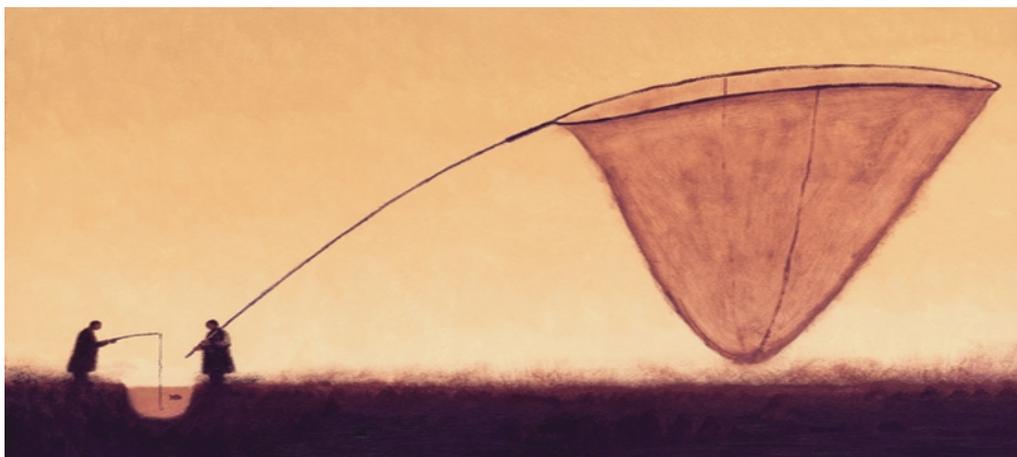
Are you very attached to your “expectations” or do you hold them lightly? It is one thing to have a working hypothesis about how someone will behave, it is quite another to take someone’s behavior for granted.

WORKING HYPOTHESES

Having expectations as a sort of working hypotheses allows you to recognize that circumstances matter. The conditions in a person’s life might mean that a certain kind of behavior might be expected under a certain set of circumstances.

Put the same person in a completely different environment, and their behavior may be fundamentally different. To expect the same would be both unwise and illogical. For example, circumstances may compel a generally calm and honest individual to behave in ways that would seem uncharacteristic and unexpected.

We are all capable of being that person under the right conditions. That person who does the unthinkable and the unexpected. There is a reason that duress exists as a defense in law.



NOTICING CHANGES

We may be good at adjusting what we expect for large variations in circumstances. We are less good at noticing how subtle and less observable changes in circumstances can impact someone's behavior.

For example, stress might lead to a colleague, friend or spouse who normally communicates very openly in that relationship appearing distant or uncollaborative. And, they may even be acting in this way unconsciously, swept up in their own difficulty.



FINAL THOUGHTS

Circumstances might make someone less able to be their “normal” self. If so, support them through that. It is easy to have fixed views and strong expectations of how people should be. It takes courage to hold our expectations lightly and to recognize our common human fallibility. Have a working hypothesis by all means, but don't take anyone's behavior for granted.