

Act without  
expectation.

- Lao Tzu



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Fold me

**Expectations –  
Defined & Explained**

Fold me

For June and July, the positivity project is doing a two part series around expectations and disappointment, and coping strategies. Up to now, we have focused and explored many aspects of positive emotions. It's also important to look at what happens when we experience negative emotions and explore ways to deal with them so that they don't bring us down.

According to the research Brene Brown has done in her book, ***Atlas of the Heart***, there are two categories of expectations: expectations that are unexamined and unexpressed (aka Stealth Expectations) and examined and expressed expectations.

### **Unexamined and Expectations**

The unconscious, unexamined, and unexpressed expectations are the most dangerous and often turn into disappointment. When we develop expectations, we paint a picture in our head of how things are going to be and how they're going to look. *The movie in our mind.* We set expectations based not only on how we fit in that picture, but also on what those around us are doing in that picture. This means that our expectations are often set on outcomes totally beyond our control, like what others think and feel and how they're going to react. When the movie fails to play out like it did in our mind, we feel disappointed. Sometimes the disappointment is severe and brings shame and hurt and anger with it. We may come away from the experience of disappointment feeling bad about ourselves and the other person. If we aren't expressing our expectations to another person and examining them ourselves, we fail to reality-check our expectations. We need to ask ourselves questions about what we want to happen or what we think will/should happen. We need to ask: *what's this about, what am I or what are you not saying?* Asking for what we need and talking openly about our expectations can make us feel vulnerable. Sometimes it's hard to ask these questions of ourselves and someone else. But that doesn't stop us from expecting.

### **Questions to ask to help avoid disappointment**

- What expectations do you have going into this?
- What do you want to happen?
- What outcome are you hoping for?
- Do you have a movie in your head of how this will look or turn out?
- Are your goals and expectations in or outside of your control?

### **Painting Done**

Brene Brown defines painting done as fully walking through expectations of what the completed task will look like. When will it be done? What will be done with the information? How will it be used? What is the context? Everything that needs to be discussed and shared to paint a picture of the expectations.

### **Examined and Expressed Expectations**

Sometimes our expectations are realistic, clearly communicated and self-aware – we understand the why. When we are intentional and thoughtful about our expectations, and things don't turn out how we thought they would, disappointment still hurts. When we've self-examined and shared expectations with someone and we feel they've let us down, it's important to 1) keep the lines of communication open, 2) circle back, and 3) talk about what we're feeling and move to accountability. *"I shared with you how important this was to me..."*

### **Takeaway**

It takes courage and time to reality-check, communicate, and dig into the intentions behind our expectations. Doing so helps us better handle disappointment and use it to grow and develop ourselves, and to create and maintain meaningful connections with ourselves and others.