

Chapter 10

Expectations Versus Reality: A Humanistic and Practical Perspective

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Introduction

Expectations, explicit or implicit, are pervasive, confronting us in almost every area of life. Expectations can shape our lives—from one moment to our overall perceptions of ourselves. Satisfying, or failing to satisfy, our expectations can have a dramatic effect on our feelings of relevancy. Depending on how meaningful the expectation, the failure to satisfy it can cause the feeling of loss of relevancy; in other words, the chasm between expectation and reality is important to defining our feelings of loss of relevancy. When influenced or aggravated by factors described in other chapters of this book, the feelings of loss of relevancy can appear to overshadow all else in our lives.

Our expectations are conscious or subconscious—those expectations that we actively and affirmatively think about, as compared to those that we do not. From what you expect when you get out of bed in the morning, for the next moment, let alone the next hour or day, you have chosen which expectations you will consciously consider as compared to those that you will unconsciously accept (or implicitly reject). In our world, and the world outside of us with which we interact every day, we take actions based on our expectations and predicate our expectations based on our actions. But we only affirmatively think about certain of our expectations. For certain persons, depending on their worldview, their expectations dominate their existence—their life expectations are the driving force. For other persons it may not because their expectations are sublimated to a single ultimate goal based on instinctive action at the moment (e.g., survival in combat, rescuing hostages) or they are not similarly motivated.

Expectations are conclusions that we ourselves draw and are largely based on our history of experiences as well as our dreams and fears. Expectations are individualized, internalized, and, depending on the situation, and too often, influenced by others. As people, we inherently are influenced by how we process information and stimuli and that which we take to heart. Expectations can thus be greatly influenced by those and that around us simply because we allow it or perceive that

we have no choice in the matter (such as a boss' expectation of her employee). Ultimately, we are, and must make ourselves, responsible for our expectations.

Expectations are the sign posts used by people to predict the future. Expectations are forward-looking. Reality measures expectations with hindsight.

This chapter focuses on expectations that are not rooted in sudden, critical determinations, but rather those that are not of an emergency nature. We discuss the pervasiveness of expectations in everyday life, what an expectation is (compared to, e.g., a hope or dream), the root of expectations, the effect of expectations, and the resolution of expectations.

The Pervasiveness of Expectations

Seemingly every step of your day, and every step of the way, is predicated on an expectation. You may not, and in fact probably do not, consciously think about it, but you have an expectation if you have any plans for the next day let alone the following week. You expect to be alive to fulfill those plans. When you go to sleep at night, don't you expect to wake up the next morning? There are those in hospitals or like facilities who have no expectation (assuming they are conscious enough) of living to the next day. Some go to sleep with the expectation of passing away, as demonstrated, albeit in 20–20 hindsight, by a change in routine, however seemingly slight but in retrospect significant.

You plan your day on the expectation that you will fulfill your plans. You do not plan your day on the expectation that you will be in the doctor's office with a broken foot, or, worse, due to an unforeseen event. When you get dressed in the morning, you do so based on your expectations of the weather. When you cross the street, you expect that you will make it safely to the other side. When you have an appointment or go to work, you leave a certain amount of time to get there on the expectation that you will be on time. When you go to work, you do so expecting the employer to be in business that day and to still employ you. Many businesses have been forced to dissolve or layoff hundreds of workers, including law firms in the 1990s to the recent case of Dewey Leboeuf. "Too big to fail" is another manifestation of an expectation. When you eat food, you do so with the expectation that you will enjoy it and it will not make you sick (the letter grades that New York City places on restaurants for [complying with sanitary laws] may lead to a certain expectation). When you have a cold, you expect it to get better in a certain amount of time. When you purchase an item and pay more than the advertised price, you expect to get change. Why do you become frustrated? Likely because you expected your computer to work (or work faster), but it did not.

Expectations also have social, economic, and political ramifications. When you date, let alone get married, you do so with a certain set of expectations about your partner. Our interaction with others is in large part predicated on expectations. Do you expect your loved ones to act in a way that others will not? Do you expect your friends to return your call? Do you expect the servers at a restaurant to be

accommodating? Do you interact with your boss or fellow employees the same way you interact with your friends or relatives?

Our very laws are reflective of societal expectations (reflected in the judgment as enumerated in the legislation passed by our elected officials) of how people should behave or how they can accord their behavior to what is acceptable within the ambit of the law. The very purpose of the law, whether civil or criminal, is to set societal boundaries (read expectations) of how society should behave, that is, what is acceptable behavior and what is not. Underlying the law is the expectation that it will be followed. In order to follow it, people must be able to predict with some level of comfort its interpretation. Hence, arises (at least in American jurisprudence) the principle of *stare decisis* [Latin: “to stand by things decided”]. It is the doctrine of precedent, under which it is necessary for a court to follow earlier judicial decisions when the same points arise again in litigation (Black’s Law Dictionary, 2004). Generally speaking, it is necessary for the courts (which interpret the laws passed by the legislature) to follow earlier judicial decisions so that people in like situations will be able to behave accordingly.

Penal laws reflect a society’s punishment for what it deems to be a crime or viewed slightly differently, society’s expectation of the punishment (or possible punishments) that result from a given action. Different societies have different expectations of their people. The philosopher Emmanuel Kant stated that a society has the right to express its moral outrage. Prostitution, for example, is legal in the “Red Light District” of Amsterdam, but not legal in, for example, New York. Marijuana is legally sanctioned for medicinal use in California, but not in New York. The May 21, 2012, *New York Law Journal* (p. 1) reported on this issue in an article entitled “Justice’s Disclosure Highlights Medical Marijuana Debate.” The article deals with Brooklyn Supreme Court (which in New York is a trial court) Justice Gustin Reichbach’s revealing in the May 16 *New York Times* of his “illegal” use of cannabis “to cope with the debilitating effects of cancer.” The death penalty is sanctioned in Texas for certain crimes, but not [Connecticut] for any crime. So while the same type of activity is criminalized, that is, societal expectations of how people should not behave is the same, the punishment is different.

Civil laws can be viewed in a like prism—society expects people to act a particular way lest they face non-penal consequences. Underlying the law of contracts is the expectation that people will adhere to their agreements. In contract law, a party can be awarded “expectation damages”—that is, damages that seek, upon a breach of contract, to put the breaching party in the same position as she would have been but for the breach. This can be looked at as satisfying the expectations to the contract of the non-breaching party. Of course, laws, and their interpretation, change. For example, the judicially and government-sanctioned racial discrimination of “separate but equal” enunciated by the United States Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 65 U.S. 537 [1896] was legally displaced 58 years later by a unanimous vote of that same court as *Brown of Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 [1954]. Strict application of precedent to the *Brown* case would have arguably mandated upholding *Plessy*. What changed? Societal mores changed and, with it, fortunately, the law. The vote of nine would not have been as meaningful if the

underlying expectation that the court's decision would be followed by this county as a whole was not realized.

Certain societies maintain order by laws that control and suppress expectations so that their leaders can remain in control. For example, in the United States we have the right of free speech. Therefore, we have the expectation that if we protest (within the boundaries of the law) against the government, we will not be sanctioned. In North Korea, for example, the right of free speech (as far as the authors can ascertain) is limited. The expectation of what may result from a protest against the government is assuredly different.

Society is constantly trying to establish our expectations. The guides, Zagat's, Yelp, and movie reviewers, are examples of media that influences or seeks to set expectations. Have you gone to a movie or a restaurant with high expectations? Why? Is it because you've seen another movie directed by the same director? Or it's a sequel? Or it stars a performer that you like? Is it a play written by a playwright whose works you enjoy? Is it a restaurant whose chef was at another restaurant that you loved? Or is it that you've been at the restaurant before? Or is it because a friend whose taste you trust recommended the restaurant, movie, play, or vacation spot? Or is it because many people wrote about it, and you accepted the crowd's view although you know no one personally who has written about it? How do you feel while you are at the restaurant, seeing the movie, or vacationing in the recommended spot? And, as importantly, why did you make that choice?

Expectations dominate in the political sphere. A politician seeks to convince his or her constituents that he or she (the politician's) can satiate if not satisfy those expectations in order to get elected. How often does the mantra "he doesn't have a chance to win" influence donations or an election outcome? A politician's popularity approval rating is a primary example of reality as contrasted with expectation. When a politician is voted into office, his or her constituents have certain expectations—that they voted into office a person who will be, do, or obtain x or y. As he or she continues in office, the constituent's perceptions of how he or she has met their expectations are reflected in opinion polls. Someone once facetiously said: "There are lies, grand lies, and statistics." Consider what an influence statistics has on our expectations. The very essence of statistics is expectations—the mean and the median can be seen as summaries of people's expectations.

Expectations predominate in entertainment as well. Gambling, such as on horse races, is predicated on expectations. In sports, a certain team is expected to win its division or the championship. A certain team is expected not to do as well if its star player is injured. When a person or team that is favored loses, it's called an "upset." And for good reason, expectations are "upsets." Reality has not met expectations. For some, this is a good thing in cases where you are a fan of or have a wager on the underdog. For others, it equates to disappointment. How many times have you heard the expression that a certain team "has the momentum?" The momentum carries with it the expectation that the team will do better.

Business is the same. A certain company is expected to earn a certain bottom line and its stock price drops if it does not, or a certain company is expected to lose a certain amount and its stock price increases if it loses less. A company's stock moves

because of what the new CEO is expected to do based on his past track experience. People buy a certain stock investment, invest in a certain mutual fund, or leave their money with a certain money manager because they have an expectation of performance.

When you buy an item of a certain make, quality, or price range, be it a car or an apartment, your expectations of it (e.g., how that car should function, the service in an apartment building) go with, and into, the purchase price that you pay. Would your expectations be met or offended if you saw an advertisement for “X” and it turned out to be “Y?” Would your expectations change based on how credible you thought the source of the advertisement was or who the person is who recommended it to you?

People stand on line to buy the newest technological gadget because of their “supped-up” expectations. They stand on line for hours prior to the opening of a Black Friday sale because they expect that they will be able to partake in the hunting for bargains.

We expect good performance to be repeated (an off year might be tolerated as long as many good years preceded or follow).

The back cover of “The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make A Big Difference” (Malcolm Gladwell, 2002) describes the book as follows:

The tipping point is that magic moment when an idea, trend, or social behavior crosses a threshold, tips, and spreads like wildfire. Just as a single sick person can start an epidemic of the flu, so too can a small but precisely targeted push cause a fashion trend, the popularity of a new product, or a drop in the crime rate. This widely acclaimed bestseller, in which Malcolm Gladwell explores and brilliantly illuminates the tipping point phenomenon, is already changing the way people throughout the world think about selling products and disseminating ideas.

Mr. Gladwell’s book can be viewed from the perspective of people’s expectations and instances of how these expectations are molded or substantively influenced. The “small but precisely target push” that causes “a fashion trend, the popularity of a new product, or a drop in the crime rate” has, we submit, its foundation in people’s expectations.

Expectation of the norm, implicit acceptance without consciously acknowledging or confronting an expectation, provides comfort. Adaptability to the unforeseen or that which suddenly arises provides the essence of certain professions and certain attributes in life. Do those in active military combat and those on a mission, to take extreme examples, have “expectations” for the next day? They have a plan, but they likely do not have expectations; rather, their “expectations” must adapt to the reality of the contingencies that they face, moment to moment, if not second to second. There are other professions that must adapt their expectations to suddenly changing circumstances. Doctors who are performing surgery may be met with a sudden, unexpected emergency, changing not only their day but their very moment. Consider what it must be like for a doctor and nurse in an emergency room when a patient is wheeled in. We daresay that their expectations are not to have expectations. Tragedies such as Katrina and the Voyager are unthinkable for the shocking loss of life and destruction, and because they belie our expectations. They belie our

expectations of the human ingenuity in both cases and capacity to respond in the case of Katrina. We have lulled ourselves into a societal expectation of being able—being able to put people in space and returning them safely, building buildings that do not fall and dams that do not break, being able to spend money without limit and without consequence, being able to do almost anything. That is not intended as in any way pejorative—it is an observation of how far our expectations have come and how easily they are shattered. Expectations are omnipresent in our lives, and society places a premium on those who can predict and satisfy expectations.

Expectations, the Manifestation of Feelings of Loss of Relevancy, and Influencing Factors

The feeling of loss of relevancy created by the gap between a person's expectation and her reality can manifest itself in many ways. As human beings, we believe, sometimes with objective reason, sometimes not, that we "should be," or we "deserve to be," in a different (read "better") place based on our background, experience, who we know, or perhaps more importantly who knows us. Feeling of loss of relevancy can manifest itself in the perception that others appear to have "gotten where they are," whereas we have not even though we have the same means or traits that they (apparently) possess. It is unclear what the difference maker is between them and us. Why are they where it appears that we want to be? It can manifest itself in the feeling that although we "play by the rules," we try hard, we care, and we feel unrequited. Leaders have broken out of society's imposed boundaries. They have gone beyond apparent reason; they are conditioned not to simply accept. They have a persistent, abiding belief that they belong more than society says—a drive, a self-actualization—the spiritual self (which is very different from a religious self). To some, stories of perseverance, such as Abraham Lincoln who was fired from several jobs, however inspiring in their own right, ultimately ring hollow because they are just that—stories without practical applicability to our daily living and problems. They may remind us of our expectations, but they are not our reality. To others, reading biographies of famous people can steer us in positive directions especially when there is a handicap to overcome, one shared with a famous person who triumphed.

It can manifest itself in the knot in our stomach Sunday night, because we so dread Monday morning (even if we haven't worked over the weekend), we feel overworked and quite underappreciated, if not undercompensated and underappreciated. It should be different, shouldn't it? We look back and see our perceived mistakes with 20–20 hindsight.

We cannot rid ourselves of that nagging, gnawing feeling: Why has life not met our expectations, why have we not met our own? We want to feel that the world owes us something just because we are alive. The more we want it, the more we convince ourselves and the greater our hopes, dreams, and, possibly, expectations. The less we perceive that we have obtained it, or can obtain it, or have obtained it, the greater the chasm and resulting feelings of loss of relevancy.

It is the moment that connects us to a present sense of relevancy. The past may define or certainly help define our sense of relevancy. But the present is, by definition, our current relevancy. The future, on a global scale, represents our expectations, our hopes and dreams. Do we as people too often look forward or back and fail to capture the present? Even those who feel a loss of relevancy have a present relevance, but to those that live with the feeling of loss, the present fails to suffice, let alone satisfy. The connection to the moment is not to those who feel a loss of relevancy a satisfactory alternative to what lies ahead or the “bigger picture.” The present loses its separate identity from the past or future because of the feeling of the loss of relevancy.

Why can it be so difficult to focus on the moment in the midst of the continual feelings of loss of relevancy? Why is it so difficult to overcome? It is, at least in part, because of the gravitational-like pull of the past. More than “those who do not learn from the past are condemned to repeat it” (George Santanya), we are being pulled back into the past, like being sucked into a black hole from which we cannot pull ourselves out. Positive has too often become to mean to us not negative. We exist now, but we too often do not live, at least not in the moment. Our expectations and the gap between our feelings of loss of relevancy are caused by many factors.

Our expectations are influenced by numerous factors, including the past experiences that we choose to bring to bear in a particular situation, the outside influences we choose to accept or internalize, compared to those that we reject, emotions—anger, fear-suppression, and our moral compass. The varying influences on our expectations have varying degrees of importance to a particular expectation. There is no “black and white,” but there is plenty of gray.

The past, viewed as 20–20 hindsight, often embellished in retrospect (the definition of 20–20 hindsight) is too often used as the guidepost of current expectations. Decisions made “then,” particularly large ones may seem curious, if not downright ill informed. Even “small” (relatively speaking) “mistakes” can tug at us. There was a story in which people were surveyed and, in effect, were disconcerted that they had not predicted the stock market actions correctly. Why does the past, retracing our steps, have such a pull even though we cannot change it? It is because the past had, if not has, a direct bearing on our expectations. The past may have formed our expectations. We are born and raised in a way that creates commentary on our potential for performance. School grading is an example of tracking performance at an early age with regular meetings with teachers for the purpose of discussing how a particular child is doing compared to expectations influenced by notions of the child’s potential. If a child is underperforming, the teacher may suggest that there is some sort of behavioral or psychological problem within the child and recommend consultations with professionals. A student whose parents are both accomplished medical doctors may be expected to perform at a much higher level than a student with lower-achieving parents. Some of us can just not forgive ourselves for failing to meet, or thinking that we have failed to meet, them. In contrast, meeting expectations, sometimes however seemingly relatively minor, bring satisfaction. One of the authors took an exam in college, studied for it, but acknowledg-

ing to him that he would be satisfied with a B. A grade of B is what he got, and satisfied he was—regardless of how he tried not to be (gee, I could have done this or that differently, this will drag my GPA down, or he or she got a higher grade). To this day, the author recalls that he was at peace with himself over what he did. That he met his expectation is only a part of the story. The expectation, to him, was “objectively” (see the reference “to him”) realistic. He therefore was satisfied with the grade—even though his expectation was three or four tiers below the highest grade. And not even the thought that he “should have done better” was able to move him off that perception. It is self-flagellation at its finest. It is somehow comforting, even though it is uncomfortable. It is not merely trepidation of facing the moment; he risks ignoring the future and, therefore, losing the future and its promise.

Without expectations, how do we judge life? Is the quality of life dependent on meeting our expectations, “large” or “small?” Are expectations “legitimate” because they are our own? Ultimately only we can characterize our expectations. And only we can resolve them.

The Conundrum of Expectations: Expectations Are Based in Reality

Expectation has a basis in reality. How much one’s expectation is based in reality, and how important that expectation is to the person, is proportional to the feeling of loss of relevancy if the expectation is not met. In a way, we set ourselves up for failure on occasion—the ultimate trick is to “know when to hold them, know when to fold them” (from the song, “The Gambler” by Kenny Rogers, written by Don Schlitz), and know when to modify them. There may come a time when it becomes apparent to ourselves that an expectation will not be met or, for whatever reason, is no longer worth pursuing. Do we accept “defeat?” Maybe we do. Defeat may not be complete defeat, however. If there is something meaningful to us that we can take from the failure or inability to fully meet our expectation, then we should not (versus cannot) feel a total loss of relevancy. Particularly is this so if what we have taken from that “defeat” advances us toward meeting another expectation.

Searching various online dictionaries, “reality” is defined as “the quality or state of being actual or true” and “a real event, entity or state of affairs.” In turn, “real” is defined as “being or occurring in fact or actuality, having verifiable existence.” “True, not merely ostensible, nominal or apparent ...” In comparison to reality, expectation has been defined as “presumed degree of probability of an occurrence,” “the act or state of expecting: anticipation,” “a strong belief that something will happen or be the case in the future,” “a belief that someone will or should achieve something,” “the belief that something will happen,” and “a belief that something *should* happen in a particular way or that someone or something *should* have particular qualities or behavior.” In turn, a belief is defined as a conviction of the truth of some statement or the reality of some being or phenomenon especially when based on examination of evidence.

Note in particular the tenses that define “real” as compared to “expectation.” Real invokes the present, expectation invokes the future. A fundamental tenet of an expectation (discussed *infra*) is that it is predicated on the future forward-looking with all of the vagaries and contingencies that entails. An expectation must be contrasted to a hope, a dream, a fantasy, or a delusion. A hope has been defined as “to cherish a desire with anticipation; to desire with expectation of obtainment.” A dream has been defined as “a visionary creation of the imagination.” See also the definition of fantasy—a creation of the imaginative faculty whether expressed or merely conceived. In contrast, a delusion has been defined as “a persistent false psychotic belief regarding the self or persons or objects outside the self that is maintained despite indisputable evidence to the contrary.” One could hope to win the lottery (and at least one of the authors do), but the expectation of winning it better be pretty low (one in over 80 million for the US Powerball Lottery). We can dream or fantasize about the homes, cars, or other items that we would buy if we won the lottery, but we are not going out and making those purchases—or planning our lives—in the belief that we are going to win it. Doing so would be a delusion. Viewed on a spectrum, an expectation is more grounded in reality than any of its cousins hopes, dreams, fantasies, or delusions. We intuitively understand that a hope or dream has less importance to us precisely because, by definition, it is less likely to occur. When a hope or dream is not fulfilled, there should thus be less of a feeling of loss of relevancy than if an expectation is not met. Sometimes, however, a hope or dream has equal importance to an expectation and leaves the unrequited desirer feeling the loss of relevancy as well as being frustrated. This is because the emotional pull of a hope or dream overrides the logic, the rational realization of how unlikely the hope of a dream may be fulfilled in the first place.

There are thus three defining factors to understanding the feeling of loss of relevancy caused by the gap between expectation and reality: The extent to which we perceive that the expectation is based in reality including the level of certainty we have that the expectation will be met, how important meeting the expectation is to us, and, of course, whether the expectation is satisfied.

In this regard, according to expectancy-value theory, behavior is a function of the expectancies one has and the value of the goal toward which one is working. Such an approach predicts that, when more than one behavior is possible, the behavior chosen will be the one with the largest combination of expected success and value. Expectancy-value theories hold that people are goal-oriented beings. The behaviors they perform in response to their beliefs and values are undertaken to achieve some end. However, although expectancy-value theory can be used to explain central concepts in uses and gratifications research, there are other factors that influence the process. For example, the social and psychological origins of needs, which give rise to motives for behavior, which may be guided by beliefs, values, and social circumstances into seeking various gratifications through media consumption and other non-media behaviors.

“Dr. Martin Fishbein is credited with developing the expectancy-value theory (EVT) in the early to mid-1970s. It is sometimes referred to as Fishbein’s expectancy-value theory or simply expectancy-value model. The primary work typically

cited by scholars referring to EVT is Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen's 1975 book called *Belief, Attitude, Intention, and Behavior: An Introduction to Theory and Research*. The seed work of EVT can be seen in Fishbein's doctoral dissertation, *A Theoretical and Empirical Investigation of the Interrelation Between Belief about an Object and the Attitude Toward that Object* (1961, UCLA) and two subsequent articles in 1962 and 1963 in the journal *Human Relations*. Fishbein's work drew on the writings of researchers such as Ward Edwards, Milton J. Rosenberg, Edward Tolman, and John B. Watson" (*University of Twente*, www.utwente.nl/cw/theorieenoverzicht/Theory (expectancy-value theory)).

If the expectation is important to us and we have a high level of certainty that it will come to fruition, the fact that we perceive that the expectation is based in reality makes it all the more difficult to cope with if that expectation is not met, and all the more satisfying if it is.

The Extent to Which We Perceive the Expectation Is Reality Based

The extent to which we perceive that an expectation is based in reality is the foundation upon which the difference between expectation and reality, and thus the resulting feelings of loss of relevancy and frustration, is based. If we believe that the expectation is realistic, then we become confident (if not assured, albeit self-assured) that our expectation will be met. If it is not, then we feel the loss of relevancy, presumably proportional to how confident we were that our expectation would be met. The extent to which we perceive that an expectation is based on reality is oftentimes based on factors outside of ourselves partly because we cannot know what the objective reality is. In turn, this is because (as mentioned) expectations are forward-looking. Analogous to the lyrics in the Carly Simon song "Anticipation"—"We can never know about the days to come But we think about them anyway, yay, ... Anticipation... is keepin' me waitin'."

Because expectations are forward-looking, there is an important temporal aspect to expectations. The further in the future that you expect the expectation to be fulfilled, the more potential there is for intervening factors to affect the expected outcome.

For example, if your expectation is to be able to safely cross the street, the time to satisfy that expectation is probably around 30s. Within those 30s, there are likely a limited number of factors that will likely influence the desired outcome. Contrast that to the California Angels' (presumed) expectation that Albert Pujols will be worth (to them) \$250 million over 10 years and the Florida Marlins' (presumed) expectation that Jose Reyes will worth (to them) \$106 million over a certain number of years. Upon what are these expectations based? The team's expectations are based on their analysis of their particular needs, how the decision makers perceive that the players will help the teams in the future, including, one would assume, attendance and other revenue streams, which are, in part, based on the relative success

of the team measured by how the team does in the playoffs. Baseball analysts have analyzed whether these will be good deals or “bad” deals for the teams. They have employed factors, including the age of the players, productivity based on age, and, of course, how the players have performed in their careers. All of which serve to highlight the fact that many factors come into play, particularly with the passage of time. Should we also be asking, what are Messrs. Pujols’ and Reyes’s expectations of themselves?

The same basic analysis applies equally to when an employer hires a worker and the worker agrees to work for the employer, as it does to Messrs. Pujols and Reyes. An employer will hire you based on her expectations of your performance, which, in turn, is based on your education and past experience juxtaposed to the new job description and needs of the employer. The most notable exception to expectation-based hiring is when the employer does a favor for a friend. A sort of, optimistically speaking, scientific-based lottery—what has happened before is a predictor of what will occur in the future. Put differently, the steps you take now will lead to a certain result.

But in fact is that so? To what extent is anything in the past a precursor, let alone a guarantor, of the future? When you have an expectation, especially an important expectation that is a question that you need to ask and answer.

In what we term the control factor of expectations people believe that they have control over certain things more so than others. Control, in an ideal world, would be if one could guarantee with 100 % certainty the fulfillment of an expectation—it is a basis for comfort that the expectation will occur. The issue is at what point does it become a false basis?

Let’s return to our crossing the street example. Just because you have crossed the street 1 or 1,000 times does not mean that you will make it safely across the street the next time. But you expect (probably subconsciously) that you will otherwise (all things being equal) you would not cross the street.

Let’s break it down. You look to see if the light is red and if cars are stopped. This equates to as much control as you have in that situation. Let’s compare to that the Los Angeles Angels and Mr. Pujols. What “control” does Mr. Pujols have? What “control” do the Angels have? Let’s throw injury into the equation—Mariano Rivera of the New York Yankees injured himself shagging fly balls (a routine that he apparently practiced for years). Undoubtedly, Mr. Rivera did not expect to injure himself doing his routine—a “freak” injury is unexpected.

The subjective perception of reality weighs heavily in our expectations. As we observed previously, expectations, by definition, have a basis in reality. Analogous to beauty being in the eye of the beholder, the perception of reality upon which an expectation is based is in the eye of the holder of the expectation. This is because people perceive subjectively. Granted that reality is not always a known quantity, because we may not know all of the facts. But expectations can only be based in reality as far as we know the facts. The issue here is whether our perceptions distort the facts and, therefore, distort our expectations—how we perceive the facts upon which our expectations are based, objectively for what the facts are or subjectively. There is a deeper level—the relevance of meaning of the facts to our expectation.

Even if we perceive the facts objectively, if our perception of the application of the facts to our expectation, for example, the impact of the facts on or their relative importance to our expectation, is subjective we will still do ourselves a disservice. Facts may of course change; therefore, the path to fulfillment of one's expectations may require flexibility to adapt accordingly. That assumes a realistic understanding and interpretation of the facts. The beauty, or perhaps challenge, is that facts and their application are rarely black or white. Rather, there is usually judgment involved, but perfect judgment is not always necessary; rather, at times a solid strategy (with some luck) suffices.

The combination of subjective perception, the fact that expectations are forward-looking or futuristic, and the potential for intervening factors, can form a formidable challenge to the fulfillment of one's expectations.

Some fans of the baseball Angels may expect Mr. Pujols to bat .300 and hit a record number of home runs. But other fans will be satisfied (read expectations met) if Mr. Pujols performs merely adequately with less stately statistics. Why the difference? Some Marlin fans may expect Mr. Reyes to win another batting title, have a superior fielding percentage, and steal his fair share of bases. But other Marlin fans may be satisfied if Mr. Reyes does not post more than an average set of statistics. What are the expectations of the decision makers who hired the ballplayers? How are they measured? Likely, they are measured differently than the fans.

Another factor is what we call the societal normative aspect of expectations. Actions occur in the usual course to the point that expectations are subconscious. You give more money than the advertised price you expect change. You say hello, you expect a response. You turn on an appliance you expect it to work. You cross the street you expect to make it to the other side. You eat and you expect not to get sick. Of course, this does not apply to our grander expectations. And here again, there is a temporal factor. Many of these are of short time frame.

Why are, or should, certain expectations be perceived as more tenuous than others? Because of the variety of factors and the potential effect that one or more of these factors has on the prospect of fulfilling the expectation, some of these factors cannot even be perceived when you are road mapping your plan toward the expectation. Another reason that time is such a critical element.

The Importance of Our Expectation to Us

The importance of the expectation to us is an exacerbating, or complimenting, factor to the extent to which we believe that the expectation is based in reality. For example, we do not expect to drop our BlackBerry when we take it out, let alone to lose it down the sewer or leave it on the seat in the subway. Dropping a mechanical gadget would likely have no importance to us so long as it continued to work. Dropping it onto the subway tracks, however, might well engender a telltale reaction in contrast to dropping a piece of gum. On a grander scale, if it is important for

one to become an astronaut, and he or she has engaged in a course of rigorous study to do so, failure might well be a significant blow.

John Greenleaf Whittier intoned “Of all sad words of tongue and pen, the saddest are these: what might have been” (Garret, 1897, p. 4). We are attracted to “what might have been” because “what might have been” are, or more poignantly were, our unrequited expectations, sometimes what we thought of as the very essence of ourselves that we did not meet. We look at ourselves in the mirror, wondering: “what might have been.” The world of what might have been is a comforting one, and that is why we are attracted to it. Because, although it is not real, it is, curiously though that is, somewhat fulfilling.

Henry David Thoreau poignantly put it this way: “The Mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with the song still in them” (2008/1854). This quote captures one of the essences of the loss of relevancy. It is worse than “what might have been,” because the desperation is quiet and unchallenged—we are not doing anything about it; rather, we are accepting it—“it is what it is” is not comforting; rather, it is a malaise from which we cannot escape. To not have “a song within [you]” is a great frustration; to have never (or without real effort) tried to find the song within you is even more frustrating; to have contemplated, but not have found the song within you is possibly a greater frustration. But to have identified the song within you and have not—to your satisfaction—at least tried to sing it is probably the greatest frustration, even more so than having tried and failed. Lord Alfred Tennyson said, “It is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all” (1850). And this is another essence of expectation. George Elliot said, “It’s never too late to become the person you might have been.”

The following poem by Eric Kreuter illustrates these points:

Realities and Aspirations

The cold, stark realities of life exist.
 They wake us up to a world of greed and wealth.
 Bitter and angry people surround us with a stare of suspicion.
 Yet freedom is just over the horizon, if we know where to look.
 We wake daily with beauty and warmth.
 First in us, then in others.
 Family and friends wait patiently, burning the candle of hope.
 Some of us will change our paths of life, others won't.
 Brought to believe that grief
 Comes in different shapes and forms.
 We can be transformed from a living death to life lived well.
 Longing to be free, opening our minds to the travel of dreams.
 In the end analysis, love shines abundantly within our souls.
 Our eternal brightness
 Illuminates the world as no mere sun can do.
 We thus aspire to inspire the uninspired
 Through our uniqueness.
 As such, we resound the majesty of the trumpet.
 No hurdle in life will ever be too large to climb.
 Active thriving replaces the passive notion of merely coping.
 Existence, therefore, requires us to succeed.
 As such, we must meet our destiny through process.

What we are today leads to tomorrow's discovery.
Plans will never substitute for spontaneity,
But good thinking always wins the battle over greed.

(Kreuter, 2005b, p. 1)

A Contrast Toward the Resolution of Expectations

Without expectations, how do we judge life? Is the quality of life dependent on meeting our expectations, “large” or “small?” Are expectations “legitimate” because they are our own? If one cannot satisfy one’s expectations, then what does one do? Is there a palatable substitute? Does “having tried and lost” suffice? There are those who adapt and a view of how one can change, but what about those who have not created their life choices or the path with which to achieve them? Is it ever too late? Is there another way? It is relatively simple to write about the problem, but what can be done? What can be done about it when one feels the black hole that is the loss of relevancy and perceives no long-term solution? When one feels that he or she no longer has a choice in career or personal life, but is instead trapped by it, the syndrome of dissatisfaction continues.

Expectations, Complacency, and Faith

We feel the loss of relevancy, but why then do we hesitate to do anything about it? Do we seek instant gratification or the desire for an immediate solution? We have not taken ourselves to where we want to be in our lives, but if we perceive that we had, we would not feel the loss of relevancy to the extent that we do. So we question the choice that we are about to make—what assurance is there that it will not lead to the same “dead end?” There is no such assurance. And in one sense that is the beauty of trying something as long as it fulfills us. Trying something so that we can sing the song before we go to the grave unfulfilled.

Too often we become complacent. It is easy to keep the mind and body at rest. This is, of course, much more challenging if you are starving or if you have goals because it may help motivate you to find new creative ways to obtain the foothold in the world that you want, or help you regain it, and will probably help you crystallize your goals toward achievement of greater success and improved mood. But first, we must examine what holds us back from our own success.

Complacency, as an art form, may occupy our being much like a parasite slowly depletes our health as it feeds off of us. Borrowing from the laws of physics: An object in motion tends to stay in motion; so too, an object (a person) at rest tends to want to stay at rest. It is for this reason that we invented the snooze button.

Adding the concept of tyranny to the equation, we can view the external force as caused by our own deliberate pattern of inaction, poor decision-making, and lack of

focus. It is different from the tyranny spoken of by Thomas Jefferson concerning the oppressive power of a nation over its people, but the effect is the same—control and stifling of freedom. When we do this to ourselves, we create an outward force invading our will and hurting our spirit's wish to become more than we are.

Such tyranny of complacency is fueled by daily doses of disappointment. We may fail an exam, become embroiled in an unsolvable controversy at work, lose our job, or become seriously ill with nobody ready, willing, or able to help us, even for the short term. As such, people become homeless or become bored or, worse, become severely depressed. How can we turn back the tide of destruction caused by such complacency?

Complacency sometimes takes a facially positive form—a release to the denouement of tension, for however important an issue that causes the pressure. There can come a time where, for objectively good reason or not—perhaps as a defense mechanism—a calm replaces the storm. Is it “really” avoidance or a needed respite? It is release, for however long. But until confronted and resolved, the issues do not go away—they are only sublimated.

Fundamentally, we must view ourselves as valuable and important human beings, equal in every real respect in terms of basic human rights. It is not a factor of financial net worth or fame or talent but starts with existence, merely being a breathing person. From there, of course, the stakes rise. We can (all of us) take stock in ourselves and consider ways to apply who we are, what we know how to do, how fast we can learn to adapt, and how much we want to succeed. Then we can choose missions to embark on and take appropriate risks. For the person who cannot get out of bed due to lethargy born of regular emotional beat-downs, fighting the urge to succumb to failure, he or she must rise, shake off the dust of sleep, clean up, and fight and claw for some minute measure of success in the 24-h period we call a day. This may mean a mini triumph of obtaining today's want ads and circling a few that look possible, then contacting one or two and, at least, making an effort to get an interview for a new job. If we look at finding a job as *the* job and attend to that well, the potential for success increases. By using the power of compounding, we must apply a consistent effort to forge our own new destiny.

What this means is a new attitude applied to an existing dilemma. We are not new but our attitude can be new. We can select an attitude of the day or week just as we select which socks to wear. Choosing a positive attitude more often than not should result in more positive events in our life. At the very minimum, the removals of glumness of a poor attitude will put people off less, resulting in greater attention in return. If we smile, the chances are someone will smile back. If we speak confidently, the chances are someone will recognize that we have something to say and some will actually listen. Getting people to listen is half the battle in creating a better world for ourselves. But when we rebel against our own best interest, we allow the fate of tyranny to become more powerful.

We are taught “rationally.” People are preoccupied by what can be proven. But science, even logic, cannot always disprove. We always want answers—and we want them now—but there is not always an answer to everything (e.g., we do not

yet know how earth was created or into what the universe is expanding, although we are advised that it is).

Life doesn't necessarily, or even often, portray as a linear, mathematically neat package. Neither should our expectations.

Faith does not teach us to fully understand; it teaches us to accept, especially when there are no answers. Faith that provides a person with insight into their soul may enable him or her to enjoy the present moment and strive to accomplish in this life because of a deep-seated sense of purposefulness and faith.

Faith can provide the person with a grounded sense of belongingness which may, itself, lead to a happier, more consistent life. The risk of losing one's spirituality may lead to feelings of loss of relevance.

Everything changes when a child finds out there is no Santa Claus. A child said to her parent one day, "Someone told me that there is no Santa Claus—is there?" To which her mother responded, "Do you think there is honey?" "Yes," the child replied. "Then there is," her mother said. "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus" represents hope.

Is tomorrow worth it? With tomorrow there is hope. Spirituality is a hope—humanity is certain. When a person loses hope, he or she loses everything. "The role of belief in healing can work both ways—a well-developed worldview is sometimes the best medicine against illness, while at the same time overly rigid habits, especially those involving lifestyle choice, can become the chronic cause of illnesses that are a long time in the making. In these terms, our beliefs can become a life-and-death matter" (Taylor, 1997, p. 46).

How does this help the parents of children who do not have jobs and do not know where the next meal may come from? What is it about words in the face of adversity—is it comfort, is it support, is it real, is it anything? Dollars are real but so are words. A place to live is real but so are words—so long as we give them meaning or at least work toward that end. For in this context, words themselves do not have meaning—our actions give them meaning. Words are the vehicle by which we communicate current thoughts, with possible lasting implications because those who act on the words give those words life. Pain is real, as John McCain knew all too well but so is spirit as he proved. We do not have to, and perhaps should not, set our expectations that high. But we can use words as the springboard for a purpose that is meaningful to ourselves.

People live lives based on expectation, desire, dreams, and hope. Hope uplifts the spiritual side, but hope must be supported by action. There is a poem entitled "Don't Quit" (Author unknown) that poignantly makes the argument that hope is necessary, but hope without effort is complacency and, therefore, bankrupt:

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,
 When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,
 When the funds are low and the debts are high,
 And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,
 When care is pressing you down a bit,
 Rest, if you must, but don't you quit.
 Life is queer with its twists and turns,
 As every one of us sometimes learns,

And many a failure turns about,
 When he might have won had he stuck it out;
 Don't give up though the pace seems slow--
 You may succeed with another blow.
 Often the goal is nearer than,
 It seems to a faint and faltering man,
 Often the struggler has given up,
 When he might have captured the victor's cup,
 And he learned too late when the night slipped down,
 How close he was to the golden crown.
 Success is failure turned inside out--
 The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,
 And you never can tell how close you are,
 It may be near when it seems so far,
 So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit--
 It's when things seem worst that you must not quit.

The Expectation of Entitlement

Expectations are too often based on our belief that we are entitled to have them fulfilled even if we cannot fulfill them ourselves, that we are entitled to have that which we expect. We would not feel a loss of relevancy, or at least not feel it to the extent that we do, but for our feeling of entitlement. We have become accustomed to guarantees that, in turn, we allow to form expectations. If we did not have a level of belief that we should have something tangible in the first place, we rationally cannot decry its loss. The fact that we had something tangible a moment ago, let alone yesterday, provides no objective reason in and of itself that we should or are entitled to have it the next moment let alone tomorrow unless we own it.

But even “ownership,” given life’s realities, can be fleeting. The vagaries of life are too great. We prefer to perceive life’s vagaries through our subjective prism instead of external reality. “It can’t happen,” read it shouldn’t happen, is a relic of the past. Human tragedies in unthinkable levels have occurred; major institutional firms have gone by the wayside—it “can’t happen?” It has happened. The unexpected is the new reality.

If we have lost a job and cannot find another one, we feel a loss of relevancy. But let us examine more closely why. The only job that we truly “own” is one from which we cannot be relieved of by someone else and that does not exist. What if you are self-employed or the owner? Your bosses are the consumers of your product or service and they can relieve you by not buying it. Because we have lost something we had? Because we lost something that we need as a means to an end to provide sustenance? That is a very real, harsh, and practical consideration. It certainly may contribute to the feeling of loss of relevancy, but is not the loss of relevancy itself. Because we failed by someone else’s standards?

Or more importantly because we failed in our own mind—that is the true feeling of loss of relevancy—that we feel that we have lost relevancy to, or because of, ourselves. We have primarily not met our own expectations and, at least what should

be secondary, expectations of others. We have aggravated the feeling of loss of relevancy by permitting the expectations of others to influence our sense of loss of relevancy.

What do we “have?” Do we already have what we need? How does that form our expectations? And to what do we believe we are entitled? We have bought into a notion of entitlement. As well, we have permitted a sense of societal normalcy to influence (aggravate) that sense. By what right am I entitled to anything? Who wrote the book of guarantee?

There is a marked difference between fairness or “rightness” and guarantee or entitlement. As with most things, men make the rules as to who is entitled to what. The politician who does not bring home the pork if not the pig is the rare exception because we vote in our individual perceived self-interest. We are not here concerned with whether it is fair or right to be entitled to anything. Whether we are or are not does not necessarily inform whether we obtain it and thus meet our expectations; however, whether we think we are is quite relevant to the extent to which we perceive the expectation will be met, particularly if we have a sense of entitlement. Thus the resolution of expectations must come from elsewhere.

In one sense, it is not difficult—“it is what it is” may not be satisfying but it is reality. To be sure “reality” may at times be unclear, but in terms of the feeling of loss of relevancy, it is clear enough. We know it because we feel it, and we know why. The trick is to make an individual choice about whether one can do something about it.

We observed that people in the Dominican Republic subsist on bare necessities but are happy. Is this an example of being happy “for no reason?” Or is it an example of being happy to be able to experience life as it is? Life that appreciates things for what they are, which is a concept that is different from passively accepting that which does not make us happy or affirmatively makes us unhappy but about which we do to little or nothing. No one has the right to judge someone else’s contentedness, to say whether a person should or should not be content under her or his own circumstances. That is an individual feeling and an important point of satisfying an expectation and feeling relevant. It all depends on one’s priorities. One person may find true contentment from a bigger house or car or more money in the bank. Another may find it from a conversation with a friend. But so long as we are truly content, he or she cannot feel a complete loss of relevancy. It’s a truism, but time goes fast. Life is short. Appreciating the moment is underestimated, if not ignored, in our go-go, 24-h news, pressure-packed society, to our detriment. There is a common request interestingly made during an exercise class and at spirited musical religious service—bring yourself into the room, leave your problems at the door, they don’t affect you now.

Our problems nag at us. We feel better when we can truly let them go, even for the moment so long as we truly let them go and are completely absorbed into the moment—when we dance with our children, when we look up at the stars with our child in our arms, when we marvel at the wonder that we’re here, and when time slows down and we appreciate the moment. Is this overly emotional, unrealistic, or a way to appreciate life?

The feeling of loss of relevancy is ultimately based upon how YOU feel toward you. Your feelings toward society and how YOU believe society feels toward YOU certainly play a critical role. Note however the “you” in the equation—it begins, and ends, with you. It has to. You don’t have a job; you don’t have friends; you are destitute.

People crave companionship. Depending on how much you want it you will feel a loss of relevancy if you do not have it. How many times have we heard someone bemoan that someone else—their child for example or in particular—is unhappy, does not “have a life?” Society not only accepts that it is good to have companionship but expects it. The term “loner” or the approbation that comes with not being married or being first married “later in life” is exemplary. Being married later in life does not carry the stigma it once did. Likewise, for generations, it was a particular type of companionship that “society” accepted. Historically, parts of our society have heaped scorn and violence on homosexuals and interracial relationships.

How “bad” your situation is becomes relative to what your expectations are and what your sense of entitlement is. We spoke previously of life’s most basic expectations, like waking up the next morning and making it across the street. If you expect nothing then you have everything. So what do you “have?” You have yourself and right now and whatever else it is that you can build on toward fulfilling your expectations. That is all anyone has.

Are you not entitled to have expectations? You are entitled to think what you will and believe what you want. But that does not address the issue. And therein provides a point. What “society thinks” is constantly changing. So why should society’s mores necessarily be yours? Why should society’s changes be allowed to change your inner moral foundation? There is a vast distinction between laws that we are bound to and should follow to have a civilized functioning democratic society, but even then courageous people through civil disobedience ultimately affected societal change. That is not what we’re discussing here.

The issue here is your being comfortably in control of that universe called you. That is the essence of landing on your own two feet. Well “shouldn’t” I have it—companionship, for example, “that is an accepted part of life,” but whose life? Companionship is but one example of a societal expectation. We are not suggesting that anyone avoid companionship. We are suggesting that each person must make a considered and conscious decision where to draw the line on societal expectations and how they affect or impinge on your own.

Weighed upon by the sometimes seemingly constant pressure of society, there can be a very thin line between a sense of self, of internal calm, and the demon that is a feeling of loss of relevancy. We must constantly fortify ourselves against the loss because it can strike suddenly and from any direction.

Ultimately, only we can characterize our expectations. And ultimately only we can resolve them. We may have assistance and look for guidance in resolving them, but it is we who must resolve our expectations. I think therefore I am (Descartes) is the essence of the resolution of expectations. Our expectations are a product of our thought, our essence, the journey into self that comes with trying to find self-actualization

and fulfillment, including the fulfillment of our expectations. And that no one can take from you that which you do not wish to freely give, at least in terms of our inner identity. The question you could answer is whether the power of thought overcomes the power of expectations.

When we do have expectations, they are conscious or subconscious—those expectations that we actively and affirmatively think about as compared to those that we do not. From what you expect when you get out of bed in the morning, for the next moment, let alone the next hour or day, you have chosen which expectations you will consciously consider as compared to those that you will unconsciously accept (or implicitly reject). In our world, and the world outside of us with which we interact every day, we take actions based on our expectations and predicate our expectations based on our actions. But we only affirmatively think about certain of our expectations. Certain persons may, with a worldview, depend on it. Certain persons may not because their expectations are sublimated to a single, ultimate goal, based on instinctive action at the moment (e.g., survival in combat, rescuing hostages). Expectations are individualized, internalized, and, depending on the situation, influenced by others because, as people, we allow ourselves to be influenced by how we process information and stimuli.

Synopsis of this chapter:

1. Expectations confront us in many ways throughout life.
2. The failure to satisfy an expectation, subject to severity of importance, can dramatically impact our feelings of relevancy.
3. Expectations can dominate one's existence.
4. Reality measures expectations with hindsight.
5. Expectations have social, economic, and political ramifications.
6. Laws, and punishment for violating laws, are reflective of societal expectations.
7. Society tries to establish our expectations.
8. The feelings of loss of relevancy created as a result of a gap between a person's expectation and reality can manifest in many ways.
9. Some aspects of quality of life must be measured in the form of meeting expectations.
10. Expectations as contrasted with hopes, dreams, fantasies, and delusions.
11. According to expectancy-value theory, behavior is a function of the expectancies one has and the value of the goal toward which one is working.
12. Expectations are forward-looking, thus intervening factors become more prevalent the further in the future you look for expectations to be fulfilled.
13. Complacency can interfere with the process of striving to have expectations met.
14. It is important to apply a new attitude to an existing dilemma.
15. Faith can teach us to accept that which we cannot understand.
16. People live lives based on expectation, desire, dreams, and hope.
17. A sense of entitlement can lead to expectations, equating to false guarantees.
18. Only we can categorize our expectations.