

Disappointment Occurs for All of Us

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If you are a leader, you've experienced disappointment. And it doesn't matter if you're leading a family, leading a men's or women's group at church, or just leading your own life, you'll be disappointed again and again. Wouldn't it be great to learn how to reduce the frequency and intensity of disappointments?

Disappointment occurs when reality falls short of your expectations. Much of the time, you may not even be aware that you have unexpressed expectations until disappointment occurs. Those situations can generate huge frustrations.

Actually, I'm writing this article shortly after a series of disappointments. I was angry. A sure sign of misplaced anger is when you start blaming other people, inanimate objects, or "the world" for your discouragement. It's tempting to lash out, but whatever relief that provides is empty and short-lived, and it usually results in damage to relationships.

After about twenty minutes of increasing frustrations over a series of events, I had to call "time out" and have a talk with myself. In every situation, I could have done something to have prevented or reduced the anxiety I was feeling. And though it was not easy to do, once I accepted the responsibility for my anger, I could start doing something constructive with every circumstance that was bothering me.

There are three keys to reducing disappointments in your life. Study these three points. You may feel like challenging them initially. I feel like challenging them often, but I've learned it's futile!

I encourage you to think about each of these three perspectives the next time disappointment occurs for you. As you do, entertain the possibility that there might be some truth in the following statements. Then think creatively about how you might handle things differently next time.

Based on the circumstances, you may not be able to avoid disappointment THIS time. However, if you'll evaluate what you did well and what you could do differently (better) next time, you'll find yourself dealing with consistently less disappointment as time advances.

You set the expectation. Many times, you establish your expectation unilaterally. That is, you think someone will behave in a certain way, but that other person never was a party to either launching or agreeing with the expectation.

Often, the expectation you had isn't even conscious. It's just an assumption. You feel strongly that the other person (or thing) let you down, yet what you anticipated was only in your own mind. You likely never identified the expectation explicitly. You merely presumed some particular thing would happen.

Of course, sometimes you do involve the other person in setting the expectation. As a leader, you probably delegate responsibility frequently. When you do, are you certain that the other person knows what outcome you desire and understands your boundary conditions and reporting requirements?

I share with my clients a simple model that, when used properly, consumes little time yet allows both parties to participate fully and understand the expectations they have of each other. As a leader, you have a responsibility to engage other individuals in setting expectations associated with their behaviors.

You influence the outcome. There's very little in life that you control, but you can influence a lot. And if you consistently put your energies against what you can influence, your influence will grow.

If, on the other hand, you put your energies against what you can't influence, that's when it begins to feel like the whole world is out to get you! And that's when others begin to look at you as a complainer, not a contributor. As a leader, you'd really rather not develop the reputation of being a victim.

Once the outcome occurs, you control your response. Yep, the only thing in life that you have total control over is how you choose to respond to any given situation. And you always have multiple options available to you.

Let me explain how I learned this reality. Early in my career, I was talking with the plant manager. I told him about our plans for a safety promotion. He calmly asked, "What were the four other alternatives that you considered and rejected in favor of that idea?" As you might imagine, the ONLY idea I'd had was the one I described to him. He made his point. We always have multiple options!

So, back to why I'm writing this article. As I considered how to respond to my frustrations, I decided some good might come if I shared these suggestions with you.

I hope you'll think deeply about the three points above. Try applying them in your life. Get comfortable with their reality. Then share the concepts with individuals under your influence.