



# STAYWELL

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## The Cost of Unrealistic Expectations

Have you ever had a situation occur where what was expected to happen did not happen and was followed by frustration, anxiety, painful feelings and thoughts? Too often unrealistic expectations that we set for ourselves can lead to poor mental and physical health. Even worse, over time, this can lead to low expectations and feelings of helplessness and failure, even though things may not be that bad. Ultimately this may lead to discontent and resentment and cause an individual to fail to recognize the good in his/her life and fail to relish on good experiences.

Discontent and resentment can lead to gloominess, pessimism, anger, bitterness, symptoms of chronic pain, fatigue, and poor overall health. According to clinical psychologist, Mirand Morris, PhD, he indicated that having unrealistic expectations are "part of the human experience," and "having unrealistic expectations are normal, and in contrast it is an unrealistic expectation to not have these."

Problems occur when individuals allow unrealistic expectations to control his/her actions. Unrealistic expectations can destroy relationships with extended family, children, spouses, friends and fellow employees. Further, it can lead a person to quit looking forward and being progressive.

In some situations, unrealistic expectations can even cause a person to demean and belittle others. It may cause a person to take on too much or inflate his/her own ego and believe that he/she is the only one that can accomplish assignments. For some people, this leads to

micromanaging and becoming blinded to the real facts, of who other people are and what a person can achieve when given the chance. It can also blind individuals from seeing another person's point of view. Other people cannot live up to what the blinded person has falsely created in his/her own mind. The result is negative for both parties. When expectations are unrealistic, no one wins and those involved are set up for failure.

Years ago I sat in a meeting and someone commented that if an individual does not have all of the information about another person, then the blanks are naturally filled in, usually with false assumptions. This often leads to false conclusions, negative feelings or false perceptions and causes people to act inappropriately as a result.

Unrealistic expectations may lead to another person's feelings of failure or incompetence. This can cause his/her failure to thrive, and be challenged in the future causing the person to be stuck in an unproductive mundane routine.

Marriage is a great example. Often the media portrays that good marriages are easy. This falsely leads people to believe that his/her marriage may not be good. According to Selena C. Snow, a clinical psychologist, "As a result, your relationship continues to deteriorate and maybe even ends." If someone does not meet these unrealistic expectations we set on them, false conclusions are drawn, which leads to negative thoughts and behavior. Snow stated that "relationships are actually difficult and require effort, such as thoughtfulness and compromise even when the marriage is going well." That is true with all relationships.

One of the biggest unrealistic expectations I see today is brought on by media, i.e., commercials, advertisements, celebrity endorsements doctored stories or photos of celebrities and unrealistic body images. This has an enormous impact on society, especially the youth. The National Center for Health Statistics demonstrates the average female weighs 49 pounds more than the typical model. In addition, most models appear anorexic and unhealthy, this image is what many are unrealistically striving for.

Unrealistic expectations and celebrity endorsements lead to Americans spending hundreds of billions of dollars a year on weight loss supplements, diets, programs, gadgets, camps, trainers, etc., to look like these unrealistic stars. Unfortunately many times the photos are photo shopped to an image that is impossible to achieve. Most of these models don't actually look that way in real life. Marketing experts do it to play on consumer's emotions and make the consumer feel bad about his/her own body image to sell more of the product.

Interestingly, research demonstrates just the opposite when it comes to health and longevity. Several studies have looked at body weight and found that those in the skinniest weight categories actually die at higher rates than those that are slightly overweight. The low-weight subjects in the studies -- those with the lowest body mass index -- had the highest rates of death from heart disease and all other causes. Patients considered to be overweight, but not obese, had lower risk for death from any cause than patients whose BMIs fell in the normal range.

The desire and unrealistic expectation to look like these models is leading to eating disorders in young girls and severe body image anxiety and depression, substance abuse, low self-esteem, and difficulties with relationships and workplace issues.

***Experts provide several tips to help in dealing with unrealistic expectations.***

1. Be able to recognize them.
2. Be able to release unrealistic expectations when you have one. Be willing to accept imperfection as part of life and grow from it.
3. Replace the expectations with something better. Reaching out, serving others, and being more compassionate improves self-esteem and reduces anxiety and negative thoughts.
4. Be open and talk about your feelings if someone has let you down, but be realistic. Be careful placing too much expectation on others that can lead them to develop more anxiety and depression because of you unloading on them; talk in compassionate helping terms, not derogatory negative terms.
5. Releasing these expectations is in your control. A person can always set a new course of action and incorporate new philosophies. Do legitimate research and stay informed. Be careful to not believe everything you read or hear. Check the sources and go deeper; many websites claims are false, even though websites claim it is "scientifically proven".

Sources:

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