

Becoming Positive Expectation-Oriented People¹

“Life is a self-fulfilling prophecy. You get what you expect, in the long run. That which you fear (or expect) most will likely come to pass. The body manifests what the mind harbors.”

The Psychology of Winning, Dennis Waitley, PhD, 1983, Chicago

“Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.” (1 Cor. 13:7-8a)

“⁵My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him. ⁶He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defence; I shall not be moved.” (Psalm 62:5-6)

The most readily identifiable quality of a total winner (whether in sports, politics, medicine, aerospace, history, science, mathematics, etc.) is an overall attitude of personal optimism and enthusiasm—an attitude of positive self-expectancy. It is the single most-discernable quality in individuals who are super achievers and admired by all alike. A winner understands (consciously or unconsciously) the psychosomatic—psyche and soma; mind and body—that the human body expresses what the mind is concerned with. They know that life ultimately is a self-fulfilling prophecy; that a person usually gets what he or she actively expects. They understand that fear and worries turn into anxiety which is distressful, resulting in the changing of hormone levels and anti-body production lowering resistance levels and increasing vulnerability to diseases and accidents. Conversely, since one’s mind and body are trying to comply one’s instructions and achieve a condition of ‘homeostasis’ or balance, if one’s mental expectancy is healthy and creative, one’s body seeks to display this general feeling with better health, energy and a condition of well-being!

Obviously, hereditary and environmental factors are extremely significant. But by expecting the best, as a way of life, one is preparing oneself physically as well as mentally for the demands of success. Leadership—the ability to attract the support and cooperation of other people—is a natural by-product of a positive self-expectancy.

I imagine that most of us could tell a story about how someone believed in us and how that belief has impacted us, maybe even changed our destiny. Those people are so few! They are so rare! Who was it for you? What did they do? How did they do it? And why? I bet anyone of us could readily name and expound details on those people.

More importantly, how can you and I do the same thing for someone else? How can we become “people-blossomers” who influence others to be better than they are? What does it take to call the people we love to be more than they dare to dream or imagine?

This is an important question, because love is primarily about what we do to serve others. Love serves others by telling them the truth when it is appropriate and necessary, helping them see the gap between where they are compared to where they want to be. In addition, love serves others by giving them grace in spite of the fact that this gap often injures us. As Rabbi Sha’ul in 1 Corinthians 13 puts it, love is patient and kind, and doesn’t take into account the wrongs that it has suffered.

The Power of Expectations

You often get what you expect. Managers understand that this is a very powerful reality, which you can harness to work for you, or you can let it control performance in a negative way. It is our job to set and use expectations in a manner which supports and enhances our lives.

The theory that expectations affect performance is known as the Pygmalion Principle. Its name is derived from a Greek myth in which a sculptor named Pygmalion sculpted a statue of a woman, and fell in love with it. His love was so strong, that it transformed the statue into a real woman. It is this transfor-

mative effect resulting from expectations which is the basis of the Pygmalion Principle. This story was popularized by British playwright George Bernard Shaw and later in the American musical, *My Fair Lady*, in which Professor Higgins changed an uneducated street girl and flower peddler into a proper lady who spoke and acted like a socialite. In the movie, Eliza Doolittle tells Professor Higgins: "The real issue is not how I act, but what your expectations of me are..."

In a nutshell, the Pygmalion Principle states that: "my expectations, whether stated or not, directly impact aptitude, character, and the intelligence and performance of other people. A stunning example of this principle at work shows up in the research of Rosenthal and Jacobson (1971) who randomly labeled two groups of elementary students as `potential achievers` and `non-achievers,` then shared that information with their teachers. As a consequence, the teachers acted toward the `achievers` differently, such as spending more time with them, being more encouraging and supportive with a `you can do it` attitude. From these students the teachers expected `dramatic intellectual growth.` And they got it. When they returned a few months later and re-tested the children, they found that the students labeled as having potential improved their IQ scores significantly, whereas the `non-achievers` had not.

Other research in the field of education has supported the theory by demonstrating that students whom the teacher believed were smarter than the rest of the group (when they were actually randomly chosen) performed substantially better than those believed to be "average." In these experiments, the only difference between the students who performed best and the rest of the group, was the teacher's expectations. Similar results have been demonstrated in the supervisor-employee relationship. In both civilian and military settings, when supervisors acted toward their subordinates in ways that suggested high expectations of productivity, the higher productivity resulted.

Another example of this principle in operation is my often-told story of Dr. Bruce Wilkinson's (Founder and President of Walk-Thru-The-Bible Ministries) first experience as a teacher at Multnomah Bible College and Biblical Seminary. He was assigned three sections of a freshman course in Bible Studies and a fellow faculty member told him that "section 2" had all the outstanding, excited about learning, crème of the crop students, when in fact, the class was no different from the other two sections. The faculty friend could not figure out why the "rookie teacher" got the assignment. Bruce erroneously was led to assume that he had an "honors class" and thus his expectations were radically different for that section than from the other two. Midway thru the semester, he found out that all the sections were the same in terms of students and to his amazement he could show proof that "section 2" had performed 25-45% better than the other sections. But given that the students were the same, in the same course, with same teacher, on the same day, using the same lesson plan, and with the same course structure the only factor that could explain "section 2"'s performance was only the teacher's (Bruce's) expectation!

How do the students pick up these expectations? They were not told. But they knew! Perhaps there is something going on in people that only G-d knows and sees but that you and I do not see. Yet it is perceived even if neither the sender nor the receiver are not aware of it. In medicine, this is called the "placebo" effect. If enough confidence is instilled in a patient, even a "sugar pill" may cause healing. The fact is that people (in particular, our own children) will try, consciously or not, to live up to our expectations.

The principle works whether our expectations are positive or negative. What do you think happens to a child when we say: "you will never be good in math" or "you are the most foolish and disobedient child in the world." What do you think happens? They try and live up to those negative expectations. Any surprises here? What happens when your self-talk is: "I am the stupidest person" or "I am the slowest at..." You guessed it! We become what we say, and fulfill the essence of those very words, even to

our own detriment. Let me share the story of Elvis Presley and his death at the very same age as his own mother...

Becoming a People Blossomer

It is clear in Scripture that we are to believe and encourage the best of all people in all circumstances. This unconditional expression of love is what 1 Cor. 13 is all about. Further, we are instructed to receive our expectations from G-d in Psalm 62:5. What is our responsibility before almighty G-d when it comes to expectations? The answer is to control and adjust them. Before every semester, every class, every service I am to adjust my expectations and if you will, submit them to G-d in exchange for His Expectations. I want His Expectations for you, for my family, for my students and for myself. I want the non-verbal and the non-visual signals you receive from me to be submitted to G-d and to His Messiah, who is the Rabbi of Kol Simcha. What does He want for you? He wants the very best!

Here are some ABC's on how to become a better people blossomer:

Always use opportunities to transmit Biblical and positive expectations. You have thousands of opportunities to do so on a daily basis. Make it a priority to become a people blossomer. Instead of showing disappointment on your child's performance in whatever he is doing, consider the following: "I don't think I have seen the best from you yet, it's hiding somewhere."

Be careful to monitor and control your expectations. Is there ever a time you do not have expectations? No! Who is in control of your expectations? The point is to control them.

Consider that one's behavior always reveals our expectations. Non-verbal body language (there are over 100 non-verbal gestures that have been identified by researchers, while there are only 26 letters in the alphabet for written/oral communication. This is at least a 4 to 1 ratio!) In fact, non-verbal body language is read and heard louder than words. Gestures communicate a clear message! We must control our body language, our tone, our intensity, etc. Why is it that a baby becomes tense when the mother becomes anxious, tense or afraid even though the child does not understand spoken language? This communication link cannot be manipulated and is related to a character quality we call integrity.

Don't ever express negative expectations. Rephrase your speech so as to not set failure as a goal for your own children. It is the same principle we must use in separating the sin from the sinner. G-d loves the sinner while at the same time He hates the sin. *Messiah Yeshua* did not make a single negative expectation in His tenure on the earth. He made negative statements and gave us prophecy, some of which is not pleasant, but He always blossomed his audience.

Entreat G-d to make you a people blossomer. Our Father in heaven has the greatest expectations for us. He wants the very best for us. We can become excellent at blossoming people, without hypocrisy and with complete confidence because He has empowered us to do so. The same *Messiah* who blossomed *Kefa*, Phillip, *Sha'ul* and *Yochanan* is not a respecter of persons and is ready to help you become like Him. All you have to do is ask Him.

ⁱ Portions adapted from *The Seven Laws of the Learner*, Walk-Thru-the-Bible Ministries, Bruce Wilkinson, Atlanta, GA 1982