

“The Silent Killer of Relationships”

Derek Harvey | March 8, 2016

Just after my wife and I got married, we attended a seminar on aiding the rehabilitation of human trafficking victims, particularly those trafficked for sex. (I won't get into all that...that's another story for another day.) In one of the presenter's talks, he asked the audience what the biggest cause of divorce was. Since I had just been through premarital counseling, I pretty much felt like an expert at marriage. I shot my hand up quickly to answer the question, and blurted out, “Sex, money and communication!” ...then looked at my wife next to me and grinned. Too easy.

“Wrong,” the presenter barked back. “Those are symptoms of the real problem.”

Ouch. Embarrassed much?

Not only was I given a sharp lesson in humility, but what followed changed my life. I was about to be told the **best piece of marriage advice** that this young, prideful, newly married man-boy could've ever asked for.

He continued...

“The reason marriages end in divorce is because of one thing...**unmet expectations.**”

mind blown

My newly married man-boy brain couldn't handle the revelation. I don't remember much of what was said after that. I was too busy thinking of all the unmet expectations I was already experiencing after being married a month.

Since that seminar six years ago, I have seen the pain and frustration that plays out from having unmet expectations, not just in marriage, but in *all* relationships. It's a deadly venom that flows to the heart and wreaks havoc in relationships.

But having unmet expectations isn't just a marriage problem. It's a **life problem.**

It doesn't matter whether you're single, married, working, unemployed, old, young or [insert demographic here]. Having unmet expectations is lethal to everyone. No one is immune.

So...what's the solution?

I'm a math guy. I 'heart' equations. I love crunching numbers and thoroughly enjoyed algebra and calculus in high school (although I probably couldn't do a calculus problem to save my life now). So I came across an equation.

EXPECTATION - OBSERVATION = FRUSTRATION

Here's what that means. Below are two hypothetical situations played out...

EXPECTATION

When I come home from a long day at work, I EXPECT my wife to have dinner prepared and ready for us to sit down and eat as a family. She'll be wearing an apron with no food stains on it (because she's perfect like that) and her hair will be perfectly done up. Meanwhile, my 16-month old daughter will sit in her high chair and eat with utensils...never missing her mouth, which makes cleanup a breeze. After we all finish eating at exactly the same time, we'll head out into the Colorado sun and go for a nice family stroll, while the butler (you read that right...BUTLER son) cleans up the kitchen and prepares our home for evening activities.

OBSERVATION

I come home from work thirty minutes late, and dinner hasn't even been thought of...much less started. Because of this, my toddler is screaming her head off, signing "MORE! PLEASE! EAT!" When I search for my wife, I find her working on a design project trying to meet a deadline that's technically already past due. When I ask what's for dinner, she glares at me the way only an overworked, overtired work-from-home-momma can glare (it can scald your pupils...so the legend goes). After picking up my toddler, I make my way into the kitchen to find an abundance of NO GROCERIES. So, being the manly chef that I am, I set my eyes on cheese and bread. "Grilled cheese!" I exclaim. I put my daughter in her high chair as an influx of rage bursts from within her. I quickly grab the apple sauce pouch to appease her. It works...for now. I get to work on my grilled cheese sandwiches. Everyone eats. The kitchen is left a mess. Toys are scattered throughout the living room just waiting to break someone's ankle. My wife and I collapse on the couch, avoiding eye contact and avoiding volunteering to clean the kitchen. I could keep going but...you get the picture.

FRUSTRATION = The difference between the two.

Quite an elaborate illustration, I know. But I'm trying to paint the picture of what our expectations can be like versus what life is actually like...what we observe. (DISCLAIMER: In no way was that illustration indicative of my actual life. It's either not true at all, or highly exaggerated...or spot on. The jury's still out.)

Antonio Banderas says it best, "Expectation is the mother of all frustration."

The fact of the matter is this: In life, we often have expectations that go unmet, and we're often frustrated because of it.

But we don't HAVE to be.

Here's the answer: Let your OBSERVATION take precedence over your EXPECTATION. Period.

In other words, **go with the flow**.

Some would say to not have any expectations at all. But I wouldn't go that far. I think healthy, realistic expectations that are communicated are good to have. They're something to reach for.

But when you come into a situation and your expectations aren't met, let your observation take the lead. Discard your expectation in the moment and deal with reality at hand.

Tired of being frustrated? Then set aside your unmet expectations and face reality head on. Then, after the fact, have a conversation with whoever is involved about what you expect and why.