

**AGREEMENTS**  
**vs.**  
**EXPECTATIONS**

**Information from**

***SHIFT YOUR MIND: SHIFT THE WORLD***

**By Steve Chandler**

## Chapter 42

*Follow bliss, not your expectations*

Expectations are stories I believe about how others should behave. Yet, the more expectations I have the more I set myself up for disappointment.

Because with no expectations, there can be no disappointment, only enjoying and challenging life as it is.

But listen to this: "I expect you to clean your room!"

Imagine yourself hearing those words. A knot forms in your stomach. Your throat tightens a little. Your chest feels like someone is pushing on it. You begin to mentally explore the consequences of rebellion. Because people rebel against expectations.

That's why *creating agreements* is so much more effective. No expectations, just agreements. Two people co-author the agreement in the same way that John Lennon and Paul McCartney would co-author a song, finishing it up with the words, "And, in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make."

Parents live in a constant state of anger and anxiety when they expect too much from their children. I know a woman I will call Courtney who walks around all day riddled with expectations for her children. She also has expectations for her husband. So she is in a constant state. And if she died tomorrow her tombstone would say, "DISAPPOINTED."

Take now, however, the example of a different wife and mother I know named Alexandra. Alexandra has no expectations. All human behavior is an amusing surprise to her. And her son's room is clean. How is that happening?

Because she has an agreement with her son about the room.

People can be unconsciously tormented by expectations...their own and those of others. And it keeps them from ever growing into who they could be.

Most people (and when I say most people, I'm not saying I'm different; I'm talking about myself for most of my life! So, when I say "most people," don't think I am looking down at others—they're me!)...so, most people live desperate lives based on expectations.

They wake up in the morning and they put their sensors out and ask themselves subconsciously, "What do people expect of *me* today?" and then they try to live up to all that. It becomes a life run totally by other people's expectations. Or the imagined expectations of others.

What does my boss expect? What does my partner expect? What do my kids expect?

I was talking to someone the other day who was thinking of joining a singing group. For him it would be a revitalizing, self-nurturing experience. Only two days a month would he do this, but he finally said, "I ultimately can't do it because one of my children is involved in softball, and I would not want to miss even one day of that because she expects it."

Does he know that for sure? Would that little girl later in life say that she would have wanted her father to give up his singing to not displease her for one moment?

If I spend all my time trying to live up to others' expectations, it's a no-win situation. Because I can never fully do it. They'll just keep adding more expectations. Not only that—if I'm living my life based on living up to other people's expectations, I will sink down my ladder and go down into the low gear of resentment.

I will always resent, subconsciously, the people whose expectations I am trying to live up to. I mean really, who are

*they?* Deep down I know this spirit of mine that says, “Who are they? Who are *they* to have me try to live up to their expectations all day? Do I never get my independence? Do I never get to be my own person?”

I had an agent contact me not long ago to ask if I would write a book called *100 Ways to Win People Over*. I said I would not. Even though they would pay me an advance? Even though.

I said I wouldn’t write that book because I don’t think winning people over is a very productive mission. It almost always ends up as a desperately misdirected kind of pursuit. Trying to exceed the personal expectations of others and win them over.

If I spent my life trying to impress other people and win them over, when would there be time to serve anyone? Would they pay me for winning them over? Or for serving them well? Which of those two activities do people value the most?

Winning people over in my family is also a non-productive pursuit. Why am I trying to anticipate the mercurial mood shifts of other human beings? Why do I always try to “heal” their most irrational moments?

My mind caves in when I do this. Soon I’m thinking: “Oh, no, he’s in a bad mood; what did I *do*? I better do something to put him in a good mood!!! What does he *expect*?”

That’s such a frustrating life. Instead, I want to serve! I want to enjoy people.

If I want to enjoy people at work, I will want to create agreements. What should we agree to do here? Instead of “Oh, no, I wonder what he *expects*—is he expecting me to get that report in by Friday? I can’t believe that, as overworked as I am.”

Joseph Campbell’s quest for a joyful life was successful. He found it by studying myth and allowing the heroic in myth to call to him so he could be heroic in his own life. His famous prescription was “Follow your bliss.”

People have misapplied that advice. They have used “Follow your bliss” to be a kind of modern narcissistic

rallying call to indulge yourself, make yourself feel good for now, let everyone else go hang.

That’s not really what it means. When you truly and deeply follow your bliss, you will be happy to drop expectations and create agreements.

The purpose of life for a person  
is growth,  
just as the purpose of life for trees  
and plants is growth.

Wallace D. Wattles

## Chapter 72

# *Absolutely top heavy with expectations*

Now let's revisit the earlier point I made about the weakness of expectations versus the power of agreements. Let's take it to a hands-on practical application.

I was hired to coach and train a major Fortune 75 company in Ohio recently because they had all kinds of performance breakdowns and productivity breakdowns. I was asked to go train them using the Owner/Victim distinction. The hope was that morale could be lifted among the people on the assembly line who were creating the products. And that better efficiency might follow.

Well, the real problem wasn't on the line, although morale was low and efficiency was poor. The real problem (as always) was in the leadership.

The leaders had expectations. They expected a lot from their people. They would walk around all day expecting things—they expected levels of job performance, they expected quotas to be met, expected quality standards to be hit, and expected customer deadlines to be met!

Their heads and hearts were heavy with expectation.

And then there were the stressed-out people on the line. They were trying to live up to the expectations of the leaders,

and really resenting the leaders in the process. Some of them told me that most of the expectations were unreasonable, and the leaders didn't really understand how understaffed they were and how stressed they had become.

So, the whole place was in a morale crisis.

As I moved among the leaders, and talked to them, trying to figure out "how we can fix this," they told me about a certain employee who wasn't living up to expectations.

I said, "So what's your expectation?" and they said, "Well, we expect him to get this job done by Friday so the customer can have the delivery on Monday. The customer expects it. We promised the customer the job on Monday, so we want it finished at the plant by Friday."

"Ok, great. So what happened?"

"Well, it wasn't done, and it wasn't done until the next Thursday, so the customer was very upset...and this has happened so often that we have lost our preferred status with the customer and everything has gone downhill."

"Well," I said very quietly, "who was in charge of that product being done?"

"The supervisor in the plant!"

Then I asked him a question that startled him (or at least seemed to leave him without a way to respond).

I said, "What was your agreement with him?"

And he looked at me as if I had asked him "Have you taken a ballet lesson lately?" or some very strange question, and he didn't answer. So I asked him again what the agreement was with his employee on the finishing of that job.

Then he said, "What do you mean by that?"

I said, "On the matter of getting this done by Friday, what was your agreement?"

"You mean I have to have an agreement with everybody?"

"Let's just start with that one job in question."

"Are you saying I've got to go around and get an agreement for every job? He *knew* I expected it by Friday. He got my e-mail; he knew the customer was expecting it by

Monday. I don't want to have to go hold his hand. He's a professional; I'm a professional..."

"But expectations don't work. Or am I missing something. Expectations aren't being met."

"Well, I don't know why that is!"

We had a long talk about expectations. He began to acknowledge that they were counter-productive. People do not enjoy living up to expectations. In fact, people rebel against expectations. Employees don't like it that you expect things of them. They would rather you would *agree* with them about something.

And so we worked together. I brought the foreman in, and we all sat down.

Finally the manager said to the line foreman, "Do you agree to have the next job ready by Friday?"

And the foreman said, "Well, I would like to... but I'm a little under-staffed so I can't promise it for sure."

And the leader looked a little startled and said, "What can you promise for sure?"

"If you gave me one extra person to work on it, I could promise it for Friday, for sure. If I don't have an extra person, I can promise it next Tuesday for sure."

The leader thought for a while and he said, "I'll give you an extra person. Now, with an extra person what can I count on?"

"Well, you can count on Friday."

"Thank you," and they shook hands.

That's an agreement. That's so much *stronger* than an expectation, and yet most people I work with who are leaders don't ever do that. They don't even realize that their biggest problem is that they walk around with expectations of people.

And so I go to coach them, and ask, "What's going on?"

"Well, I've got problems with this person, I've got problems with that person," and I find out the reason they have problems is because they don't have agreements. They have expectations and the expectations are not being met.

Once they shift their minds up to the art form known as creating agreements, they soar and morale improves and people feel like partners with a common mission. It takes courage to do this, but soon their courage becomes contagious.

I am open to the guidance of  
synchronicity, and do not let  
expectations hinder my path.

Dalai Lama

That's life in a world of expectations. Riding high in April, shot down in May.

But expectations are not necessary. You can live without them quite happily. And that experience soon becomes total freedom. Talk about a mind shift! Talk about shifting the whole world! Yes! It's actually possible to have no expectations of anyone, and only have agreements when you want them.

### Chapter 73

## *Well, what do you expect?*

If you are a person who walks around with expectations of other people, only two things can happen and neither one of them is good.

- 1) People don't live up to your expectation! Well, that's not fun. You're disappointed. Sometimes you're even feeling betrayed if it was a serious expectation.
- 2) The other thing that can happen is that they do live up to it! Now what? Well, you're just neutral—nothing—you expected it. So you say, "Daisy showed up to the meeting on time," you think, "but that's what I expected; so what?"

So, you either have "so what?" which is a life of boring nothingness, or you have a life of disappointment. Those are your two choices.

We all know people whose main conversational theme is their disappointment in others. If they were in the movie *Dances With Wolves* their Indian name would be *Disappointed In Others*.

"I'm so disappointed in my son; I'm so disappointed in my managing partner; I'm so disappointed in my spouse. I feel betrayed by my ex-spouse—totally betrayed."

In personal relationships, the more expectations I have the more anxious, fearful, and depressed I will be with my family.

Because my family members are just innocently going around being human. So they can't be causing all this pain. It must be something else. And it is. It's expectation.

Because if I have no expectations, I really can't be upset. If I don't expect my dog to make me dinner I'm never upset when he doesn't.

Is it possible to have no expectations of the people you care most about? I've worked with people who have learned to do it. To go home, and walk into their house, and be carrying absolutely no expectations whatsoever of any person in that home.

When you have no expectations, the only thing that's possible is fresh adventure. Continuous surprise. If your loved one does something nice for you, what a nice surprise. If he says something nice, and you didn't expect anything, you are living in pure delight.

If he says something negative or edgy, it doesn't floor you, because you didn't expect anything. It's easier to get to neutral if you start in neutral. You're already there. Most people spend most of their emotional lives fighting to get from upset to neutral so they can have a civil discussion. It's much easier to be accepting of others if that's where you begin.

When you don't expect anything to begin with you can flow with whatever is said. And whenever you want to, you can let the words roll off of you like water off a duck.

Soon your loved ones are realizing that you are never disappointed in them! What freedom that gives them to relate to you in more open and positive ways. How easy to create an agreement from that position!

A lot of people think, "If I have negative feelings, if I'm judging someone critically, if I'm upset with someone, it's *healthy* to just say it. It's *healthy* to attack sometimes, it's *healthy* even to hurt someone else, because that takes the hurt out of me; and if I say something hurtful to you it's because

## Chapter 74

### *Apply this to your life partner?*

What an unexpected pleasure life is to a child. Have you ever watched a child running around discovering things? That's how we were meant to live, we think as we watch them.

What happens to us as we grow older? Why do we lose that ongoing sense of unexpected pleasure?

I believe it is because our expectations start to accumulate and weigh us down. When we accumulate enough of them life becomes almost unbearable.

A lot of times my work involves coaching clients who are having problems with their partner—their spouse—their life partner—whatever is the politically correct way to say it these days.

They're having trouble with love.

They might have had a fight with their partner and so today in the coaching session at their office they're gloomy. I sit down and we're talking about productivity, performance, and profit, but they're not having fun with this, so I finally say, "What's going on?" and they say, "Well, I had a fight with my wife and I'm kind of depressed today."

Now it's really important to see that *expectation versus agreement* is an even more useful mind shift in personal relationships than it is at work.

the hurt in me is intolerable! But at least I can tolerate it now when I am hurting you and it goes over to you."

But how sensible and loving is that, really?

I had a client who said he had a fight with his wife and I asked him "How was it" and he said, "Well, *you know*, you've had those."

And I said, "No, I really haven't."

"Oh, come on," he said.

I said, "I really haven't. Kathy and I have been together for over fifteen years, and we've never had a fight."

He said... "Well...I...oh...yeah...ok...I forgot you're a saint, right? But I'm not, I'm a regular person."

"No, no, it's not that, I'm not a saint at all; in fact if you look at my biography I probably shouldn't be allowed to walk the earth a free man. So I'm not a saint, but I'll tell you that I don't fight with her and it's for the same reason that I don't punch the pizza delivery boy when he's late, or I don't strangle a cat in my backyard and kill it. Same reason exactly. I don't want to. I've decided that is not the kind of behavior I want to indulge in. I won't do it. It's not useful."

Some people say that fights are great. They clear the air; they purge things; they're so wonderful. They make life worth living!

But the only people I've ever heard say that are now divorced. Because, no, fights are not wonderful. They're hurtful. They can be unforgettably hurtful, and they're mean and they're selfish. It's like two children just scratching each other's eyes out. Two tantrums indulged together.

You can lose your vision that way.

So, even in personal relationships, expectations are toxic and they are cowardly. It is *cowardly* to walk around with a ton of expectations for other human beings.

"I expect this. I expect this of him; I expect you to be on time to the meeting. I expect. I expect."

That is cowardly because that's putting everything on the other person. If I'm a true leader, and you're consistently late for my team meeting... that's on *me*. That's my lack of leadership. But I'm too much of a *coward* to take

responsibility for the fact that I have a team that thinks it's OK to stroll in late to meetings. I'm too much of a coward so I make that all about *you* and I even say to you the "e" word: "I expect you to be on time!"

What happens when I use the "e" word? When people hear the word "expectation" they go down their ladder into a very rebellious, nasty state. Whenever they hear the word! Try it out. When people start telling you what they expect of you, feel how you feel it in the pit of your stomach. Feel how you tense up and get defensive right away. It doesn't bring people closer; it drives them apart.

Let's say you show up late for the meeting and I call you aside later (I don't want to embarrass you in front of the whole room) and I say, "I expect you to be on time for our meetings."

Whenever you hear what some other (superior!) human being expects of you, notice the feeling in your body. Is it warm? Does it open you? Do you feel like embracing that person? No. What usually happens when you hear the "e" word—expectation—is you get a knot in your stomach, you clench up, you get tight, you contract, and you start building your defense. You begin to defend against what the other person expects.

Human beings know deep down that they were not put on this planet to live up to the expectations of others.

Therefore, whenever you use the expectation word, you create rebellion, and now there's *less* likelihood that what you expect will happen. *Less* likelihood by expecting it!

So by expecting something to happen, you make it *not* happen.

I've never seen expectations work. I've never witnessed any kind of positive benefit they have in any relationship (personal or otherwise). I've never seen expectations bring people closer together. I've never seen an expectation make one partner more faithful.

I've never seen it do anything but damage. Terrible damage. Every time it is used inside the human system.



What I *have* seen work, beautifully, on the other hand, is *agreements*.

Human beings do not like breaking their word. And I mean all human beings including criminals. You know the loyalty oath, you know that honor among thieves is more than a concept. It's very real. It wasn't just made up by novelists and screenwriters. People will want to keep their word.

For the last ten years I've worked with leaders who move away from leading people through expectations and move over to agreements. They are very surprised. They have told me, "I don't think he'll keep the agreement." And they were pleasantly surprised.

And if he does break the agreement and doesn't keep his own word, then that's a beautiful opportunity to have another, more basic discussion. That can be a very powerful conversation. When you give me your word, will you keep it? Can I count on it? Will you not give me your word if you don't intend to keep it? Can we start there?

Because if we don't have that fundamental agreement, how can we have a relationship? If someone will actually tell you that their word means nothing, that they are going to lie to you, they are going to tell you that they are going to do something and then not do it, you can't have that person even as an employee because the basic social contract is not there.

People will keep their agreements such a high percentage of the time you don't need to worry about the few times they don't. And the times when they don't are such wonderful opportunities to sit down with them and say, "Let's look at our basic relationship with each other and how we can start over with a change of heart."

Do any of these futilities sound familiar?

"I expect *you* to make *me* feel romantic and attractive."

"I expect *you* to make *me* feel appreciated."

"I expect *you* to make *me* feel loved and celebrated for bringing money home."

"I expect *you* to make *me* feel how I want to feel."

If I walk into a conversation expecting something of the conversation, I can't be open to all possibilities anymore. I can't be surprised or surprising. I can't really have fun. I can't be compassionate and discover new things about you.

It's running into someone or something *unexpectedly* that is the most fun in life.

"What an unexpected pleasure!" people say, giving the secret of happy relationships away right there.

But can we hear them when they say it—are we really listening? What...an... *unexpected*...pleasure.

There's no pleasure like it.

An unexpected pleasure.

Life can be filled with unexpected pleasures. When you shift your mind, you find this out again.

And the beauty of shifting away from expectations is that I shift away from being at the mercy and at the effect of everyone else. I now take full responsibility for my happiness, for my financial well being, for my energy level. It's back to me. It's not on *you* anymore and the good thing about it being back to me is that I'm the only one I can really work on anyway.