

Expectations of Others Affect Behavior

The expectations we create for others often become reality. This can have interesting effects when applied out in the real world. This section contains multiple examples of how expectations have changed the lives and persuaded the behavior of other individuals.

School Teachers

Under the umbrella of expectations, teachers can be the greatest asset or the greatest destruction in a child's life. We know what happens when a teacher labels a student a "troublemaker" because it creates certain expectations for the student's actions. We have seen the labels "slow learner," "stupid," and "ADD" become projections for one's future academic success. There is the story of the substitute teacher who came to class and found a note from the regular teacher labeling one of her students as a troublemaker and another as helpful. The substitute teacher began the class looking for these two students. When she found them, she treated them accordingly. However, when the teacher returned, she was amazed when she discovered the substitute felt the troublemaker was helpful and the helper was trouble. She had gotten them mixed up! The children's behavior was based on the substitute's expectations. This is often called social labeling. People tend to live up to the positive label bestowed upon them.

On the flip side, we have all had teachers who had high expectations of us and brought us to the next level. Can you imagine how powerful this becomes? Imagine the first day of class as the teacher looks around the room at her students. What if she has an Asian student who is the son of a distinguished professor, versus one who is the son of a previous student who was a class clown? What if her students were heavily pierced and wearing all black? What do you think her assumptions and expectations would be? Her expectations would probably be fulfilled without ever even speaking to the students.

One interesting experiment revealed how teachers' expectations influenced students. Two Head Start teachers were selected who were as equal as possible in potential and in practice. Pupils were then carefully tested, and two classes were formed that were as similar as possible in background and learning potential. Next, the principal spoke with each teacher alone. He told the first teacher how fortunate she was. "You have a class of high potential pupils this year! Just don't stand in their way. They're racers and ready to run." The second teacher was told, "I'm sorry about your pupils this year. But you can't expect top students every year. Just do the best you can. We'll be understanding, regardless of the results." At the end of the year, the two classes were tested again. The first class scored significantly ahead of the second. The major differentiating factor appeared to be each teacher's expectations.

Grubby Day

You know how a lot of the schools will have dress-up days? For example, students can dress up for Halloween, Spirit Day, Pajama Day, or 50's Day? In one high school, they had a "Grubby Day." As you can imagine, on this particular day, the student behavior was less than outstanding. The administration received more complaints about student behavior on this day than on any other. The dress code set up certain assumptions, which

further set up certain expectations. Then, of course, the expectations were fulfilled by the bad behavior.

Littering

We know that children tend to put their trash directly on the floor. In one elementary school, students were given individually wrapped pieces of candy. Of course, most of the wrappers ended up on the floor and not in the garbage can. Over the next two weeks, the teacher frequently commented on how neat and tidy the children were. On a visit to the classroom, the principal remarked to the children that their classroom was one of the neatest and cleanest in the school. Even the custodian wrote a note on the blackboard telling the children how clean and tidy their classroom was. At the end of the two weeks, the children were given individually wrapped pieces of candy again. This time, most of the wrappers ended up in the trashcan.

Parental Expectation

One thing you will notice with toddlers and small children is that they behave according to the expectations of their parents. When I was single, I noticed children running and playing and sometimes bumping their heads or falling down. I also noticed that they would look at their parents so they would know how to react. If the parents showed great concern and pain in their eyes, the children would start to cry in an effort to get the attention they wanted. This would happen regardless of whether the child really felt pain or not. One of the techniques my wife and I tried as new parents was the exact opposite of this approach. We changed the expectation, and it has worked great! When our children hit their heads or get a small scrape, they look up to us and we all laugh. The amazing thing that happens is that they begin to laugh too. They realize it's not a big deal and go off to resume their activities, often laughing with us. Children act based on the expectations of their parents. You create the expectations in your voice, in your actions, and with the words you use.

Studies show that children will live up to the expectations of their parents whether those expectations are positive or negative. Bill Glass stated, "Over 90 percent of prison inmates were told by parents while growing up, 'They're going to put you in jail.'"

Blood Drive

Often when blood drive organizers make reminder calls, they end their conversations with something like, "We'll see you tomorrow at 10:00 then, okay?" and then wait for the person's commitment. Why do they do this? Studies have shown that when you create dissonance and an expectation, attendance rates dramatically increase.

Sales Applications

The power of suggestion can also be extremely effective when you engage the emotions in your tactics. For example, when your car salesman says, "You're really going to love how this car handles in the mountains," he is shifting the focus away from the sale and creating an exciting image in your head. He is also speaking as though you had already agreed to the sale because you wouldn't be driving it in the mountains unless you were

going to buy it. He's acting like it's a done deal – and the truth is, the more he does this, the more it is!

I love seeing door-to-door salespeople use this law to their advantage. They approach a door, ring the bell, and with a big smile tell the prospect they have a great presentation that person needs to see. Of course, they employ this strategy while they are wiping their feet on the person's doormat in expectation of being let in the house. You would be surprised how often this technique actually works. You see the salesperson handing the prospect his pen in expectation of signing the contract. Or have you ever felt bad leaving a store or situation where you have not bought something? The store has created the expectation that you would make a purchase.

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