

Why Am I Disappointed When Things Are Good?

Read the article first. This worksheet accompanies *Why Am I Disappointed Even When Things Are Good?* at ThoughtsFromATherapist.com, which explains how expectation becomes the baseline and why being correct is not the same as being proportionate. Search “disappointed even when things are good” on the site to find it.

When expectation becomes the baseline, what goes well can become almost invisible. This sheet does not ask us to lower our standards or call a bad meal delicious. It asks how much authority an unmet expectation gets over our attention. Choose one recent experience that was good in most ways and still left us disappointed. A few words per space is enough.

STEP ONE What registered	A rough heuristic, not mathematics: what we register from an experience is about its quality minus what we expected. A nine we expected to be a nine registers as nothing. A seven we expected to be a nine registers as a loss, though it was good.
STEP TWO State the deficit accurately	We do not need to pretend the problem was fine. Name it plainly, at its true size.
STEP THREE Does it call for action?	Some deficits carry serious consequences. Patterns of neglect, exploitation, unsafe work, or chronic relational unreliability should not be reframed into gratitude. If it calls for action, we write the action and stop there.
STEP FOUR Proportion	A perception can be accurate and still become disproportionately important. We compare the attention it took with what it is worth by our own values. <i>What else was here that I value?</i> <i>How much authority did the deficit get over my body, my relationships, my attention?</i>
STEP FIVE Receiving instead of auditing	Auditing compares what occurred with what should have occurred. Receiving registers the whole experience, including the part that went well.

A WORKED EXAMPLE: THE KITCHEN TILE

THE EXPERIENCE	A kitchen remodel. Expected a nine; it came out an eight. What registered: a loss.
THE DEFICIT	One tile is slightly misaligned. That observation is correct.
ACTION?	Poor workmanship, not neglect or danger. Ask once whether it can be reset, then let it be.
WHAT ELSE WAS HERE	No more cooking on an old coil stove. A beautiful, functional kitchen.
AUTHORITY	Attention it took: 8. What it is worth by my values: 2.
RECEIVING	Cooking dinner in the new kitchen without checking the tile first.

What happened, and what registered

Both ratings are rough. We are noticing, not calculating.

THE EXPERIENCE

What it was, where, and who was with me.

EXPECTED AND ACTUAL

Rate each from 0 to 10.

What I expected it to be

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨ ⑩

What it actually was, as fairly as I can judge

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨ ⑩

What registered (actual minus expected), and how it felt in my body:

ACCURACY

The deficit, stated plainly

What fell short, at its true size. No need to dispute it.

ACTION

Does it call for action?

Check any that apply. If none apply, move on to proportion.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Neglect | ☐ Exploitation |
| ☐ Unsafe work or a safety risk | ☐ Chronic unreliability in a relationship |
| ☐ A reasonable request I have not yet made | ☐ None of these |

IF IT CALLS FOR ACTION, THE ACTION AND WHEN:

WHERE THE STANDARD CAME FROM

Competence can set a standard that follows us into situations where we no longer control the variables.

WHAT DO I USUALLY CONTROL THAT SET THIS EXPECTATION?

Proportion

Not positive thinking. An effort to keep emotional attention proportionate to what we value.

WHAT ELSE WAS HERE

The people, the place, the part that worked, what I would have given for this at another time in my life.

THE AUTHORITY CHECK

Rate each from 0 to 10.

How much attention the deficit took

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨ ⑩

What it is worth by my own values

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨ ⑩

What the gap between those two numbers tells me:

RECEIVING INSTEAD OF AUDITING

Auditing narrows attention to the discrepancy. Receiving lets the whole experience register.

IF I HAD BEEN RECEIVING INSTEAD OF AUDITING, WHAT WOULD I HAVE NOTICED?

WHO WAS WITH ME, AND WHAT DID MY AUDITING COST THEM?

NEXT TIME, ONE THING I WILL LET REGISTER BEFORE I EVALUATE:

The deficit may still be real. When attention stays flexible enough to register the whole experience, the deficit no longer gets to define an otherwise good life.