

# Manage your expectations

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## We act surprised by what happens

*The cucumber is bitter? Then throw it out. There are brambles in the path? Then go around them. That's all you need to know. Nothing more. Don't demand to know 'why such things exist.' Anyone who understands the world will laugh at you, just as a carpenter would if you seemed shocked at finding sawdust in his workshop, or a shoemaker at scraps of leather leftover from work. (Marcus Aurelius, Meditations 8.50)*

## Our self-centered expectations create anger and frustration

We get angry, sad, or disappointed because reality doesn't meet our expectations. We get surprised because things are not as wished or hoped for.

When you find yourself frustrated, don't blame other people or outside events, but yourself and your expectations. Turn your focus inward and accept your response-ability.

The only reason we get irritated by trifles, according to Seneca, is because we didn't expect them.

*This is due to excessive self-love. We decide that we ought not to be harmed even by our enemies; each one in his heart has the king's point of view and is willing to use license, but unwilling to suffer from it. (Seneca, On Anger 2.31)*

## See the world as it really is

We're spoiled and kick and scream like a child when the world doesn't bend to our king's perspective. We only have in mind what we think the world owes us, and forget being grateful for what we're lucky to have.

Our self-centred expectations and desires are the main reasons for our

anger and frustration. Therefore, we want to bring them more in line with reality. This way, we'll be less likely to feel let down by the universe. Maybe we can desire only what's within our control. And expect unexpected things.

As aspiring Stoics, we try to see the world as it really is, rather than demanding that it fits our expectations. We must remind ourselves what the world is like, what we can expect to encounter in it, and what lies within our own control. The wise person, says Seneca, "will ensure that none of what happens will come unexpectedly." (Seneca, On Benefits, 4.34)

*What is quite unlooked for is more crushing in its effect, and unexpectedness adds to the weight of a disaster. The fact that it was unforeseen has never failed to intensify a person's grief. This is a reason for ensuring that nothing ever takes us by surprise. We should project our thoughts ahead of us at every turn and have in mind every possible eventuality instead of only the usual course of events. (Seneca, Letters from a Stoic, 91)*

Devastation often depends on how unlikely we considered an event in the first place.

## Keep your expectations in check

That's why it's important to keep our expectations in check by regularly engaging in negative visualization. If we imagine the worst, we won't have to deal with many unmet expectations and can drastically reduce the negative emotions we experience.

Let's mentally rehearse the worst that could happen and see how a situation can unfold contrary to our hopes and expectations—and we'll be at peace with whatever happens.

## Nothing lasts forever

We shouldn't be surprised by anything, especially not by things that happen in the normal course of events. Things come and go. Nothing lasts forever.

*Remember: you shouldn't be surprised that a fig tree produces figs, nor the world what it produces. A good doctor isn't surprised when his patients have fevers, or a helmsman when the wind blows against him. (Marcus Aurelius, Meditations 8.15)*



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