

Great Expectations



Life is easy when we get what we want - we are typically pretty happy and content. But how well do you handle things when they don't go your way? What would you do if your wedding day didn't go quite as planned, or you didn't get your dream house? After you've tried everything within reason to get what you want and it still doesn't work out, how good are you at learning to live without it?

Benjamin Disraeli said, "What we anticipate seldom occurs, what we least expect generally happens." As with life in general, the planning of your wedding and your marriage is likely to bring pleasant and not-so-pleasant surprises your way. For example, for a number of reasons, my husband and I were not able to take our honeymoon until two years after our marriage. Of course we were disappointed that we could not go right away and at times it felt like we would never get there. But we did, finally! And we had a fantastic time.

Losses and disappointments come in all shapes and sizes. As you would expect, things that are more meaningful are usually more difficult to "get over." And even after you've had your moments of denial, anger, bargaining, and sadness, and reached acceptance, it is normal to re-experience those feelings at times later on. What helps us to move forward?

Forgiveness and letting go. Resentment and blame are like tooth decay. They will slowly eat away at your relationship if you let them. If you hold onto old hurts and disappointments and continue to bring them into the present, you are setting yourself up to fail. We could have allowed our disappointment about not having a honeymoon negatively affect our wedding celebration but we chose not to and rather focused on what aspects we did have to enjoy at that time. Forgiveness is a choice (and it does not mean you have to forget). Even if you choose not to wholeheartedly forgive, you can still choose to let go and be in the present. Ask yourself: is there any benefit to holding on to what you cannot change? The answer is always no. Examine how your resentment and anger is impacting your ability to enjoy your present.

Learn to roll with and appreciate the unexpected. Sometimes the best gifts and the most important life lessons come from the unexpected. Optimists turn "failures" into "challenges" and use them as learning experiences. Couples who successfully work through life's challenges find that their bond strengthens. Consider it therapeutic for your relationship! Our delayed honeymoon gave us a new joint venture upon which to focus our energies and gave us something to look forward to down the road. It also gave us the opportunity to consider other locations that we would not have pursued at the time and we were able to go somewhere more lavish and exotic than we first hoped.

A willingness to compromise or change. There is nothing wrong with wanting or hoping for things but you want to be careful about limiting yourself by thinking there is only one route to happiness. Listen to your self-talk. Do you think you "must" have that dream house in order to be happy or would you "like" to have your dream house? It seems subtle, but the words matter. And don't assume that other people will have the same "shoulds" as you do. Compromise is inevitable in order to make a relationship work.

I can't say with any certainty that we had a better time on our belated honeymoon than what we would have had if we went earlier. But I have a feeling that we appreciated it even more. And it was really fun to be in "newlywed" mode again and to tell everyone we were "just married!"

Without the benefit of foresight none of us knows if our marriage or life will be as we anticipate. So look ahead but not too far ahead. Plan but allow for flexibility. I believe that those who can accept and cope with disappointments and losses are the most successful at living, because nothing in life is permanent or guaranteed. If you can remember this basic truth, and learn a few strategies to cope with unfulfilled expectations, you and your marriage will have a greater chance of success.

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