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(Un)realistic Expectations

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When we invest our time in something important, we inevitably create expectations. These expectations can be realistic and sometimes they can save us from disappointment or other outcomes we partially predicted and thus expected. But when our expectations are unrealistic, it can seriously jeopardize the process of overcoming fear.

Our expectations also determine the way we perceive certain events once they've already happened. If we are personally involved in such event, the effect of our expectations is even greater. That is of particular importance for public speaking because not only are we a part of the event, but we are actually in the center of it.

Let's review the most common unrealistic expectations, and consider their realistic alternatives.

The banner features the Explorable logo and the text "Quiz Time!". Below the logo are three quiz cards:

- Card 1: Image of red roller skates on a wooden deck. Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2
- Card 2: Image of a fan of colorful pencils. Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2
- Card 3: Image of a Ferris wheel at sunset. Quiz: Flags in Europe

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Unrealistic Expectation

Next time I speak in public, my fear will be gone entirely.

Realistic Alternative

As you probably know by now, working on your anxiety is not a one-time event, it's a process.

As such, it requires time, commitment, energy and a lot of exposure. In the context of speaking in public, that means that your next public performance will certainly be better than your previous one, but you still have a lot of work to do.

There is a possibility that fear will never entirely disappear, but you'll learn how to cope with it, and instead of fixating, you will be able to focus on other relevant aspects of a situation. For example, someone could have overcome their fear of public speaking, but still, feel nervous when talking in front of people they do not know.

A teacher often speaks in front of others, but may still be anxious whenever there is a new class of students. Still, what is important is to believe that you can handle that fear: engage in what you are supposed to do, and very soon your fear would wear off. As you already know, the key is to acknowledge and accept your anxiety, then move on to positive and constructive thoughts and behaviors, relevant to your speech.

Unrealistic Expectation

Once I face my fear, I'll never experience it again.

Realistic Alternative

In popular culture (TV shows, movies, books), when you hear that someone faced a fear, that person is usually forever free from it. But in reality, that's not the case. When we face a fear, we are one step closer to overcoming it.

However, the process can take much longer. Sometimes, even if you have been doing well in coping with anxiety, you can regress back to some of the previous steps. That is a natural part of this process, and it doesn't mean that you are not walking the path to being more confident. It is in these times when you're not reaching your goal in the way you've imagined, that are crucial.

Sadly, a lot of people give up, when they realize that they'll have to do much more than face a frightening situation once. If that happens to you, don't give up - put some extra effort in realizing what caused the stagnation and resolve it.

Unrealistic Expectation

I'll never have to deal with the fear of public speaking again after this.

Realistic Alternative

All of these unrealistic expectations revolve around the idea that facing a fear is a one-time event that will completely transform you from an anxious public speaker to a self-confident one. Indeed, the result of facing your fears can be gaining more confidence, but the emphasis is on experience. Each time you expose yourself to the fear, it will become decreased.

The process can take weeks, months, even years, but it requires patience, commitment, self-compassion, and perseverance, especially when it is most difficult. After all, you didn't "catch"

your fear as you catch a cold; it took time to develop and maintain. It will also take the time to train yourself to respond differently to the same situation.

Being Brave Is About Facing Fear

The most important element to always keep in mind is that every time you stand in front of other people and speak, you are confronting and beating your fear. If you avoid or ignore it, then your fear wins. Not being afraid of public speaking isn't the only indicator of your success; the fact that you are purposefully acting, despite your fear, is the most significant accomplishment.

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