

Expectations

It was once said that “the secret to happiness in life is to simply lower your expectations.” The first time I heard this I laughed aloud. It struck me as very humorous. But as I get older and experience more I’ve started thinking a bit deeper about that statement. I think there may be some truth in it.

A number of years ago a philosophy slowly arose in this country, promoted initially in sports, and then moving into education and business, that promised the reward of excellence by way of goal-setting. Setting lofty goals was the only way to achieve them. Phrases like “Reach for the stars” became a slogan for a generation. Coaches, managers, leaders, mentors and psychologists encouraged you to “dream big” and you’d get what you wanted. And that you must have a goal, write it down, review it daily and never rest until you achieve it.

While this thinking may aid some people in obtaining their goals it has a potential to create problems with others.

Of course we all aspire to do well and although I am a very big supporter of thinking positive thoughts and using positive mental imagery, I see a problem in some individuals that set unrealistic goals.

Examples of unrealistic goals in drag racing might be "I'm going to leave first every time" or "I'm going to win every round" and other totally unobtainable objectives.

Now there is a big difference between "trying to win every round" and "expecting to win every round" or "trying to leave first every time" and "expecting to leave first every time". Obviously you should try to have good performances and improve or maintain your performance if you want to succeed. But setting goals like this and expecting it is something different.

So what do you do if you are not achieving your goals?

Ask yourself first if they are realistic. If they are not it's quite likely that you'll become frustrated by continually missing goals which can be a result of setting goals so big and so far away that you never reach them.

The answer I believe lies in setting realistic obtainable goals and having a little more patience. If you want to have goals then I think it may be better to set near term goals that are much smaller and more obtainable. Your bigger goals can be a long way off in the future... and that's okay. You should also enjoy your accomplishments along the way realizing that each step you take is important and worthwhile.

I see hundreds of new drivers every year. They arrive wide eyed with smiles and enthusiasm. This is a great attitude to have and can help them if they also have realistic

expectations of how long it'll take them to master the techniques of driving drag race cars. Many of them (especially our alcohol dragster and funny car drivers) believe they'll just hop in the car, make a few laps, get licensed, get a ride, win a championship, get their photo on the cover of National Dragster and on and on and on. They very much underestimate how hard all of this really is.

Following their first introduction to a launch in an Alcohol Funny Car often comes the response... "holy *+!^!" It takes them a few runs just to start to learn what they don't know and can't do. Then it takes me a while working with them to calm them down and get them to realize that these cars are fast and it's going to take some time to learn how to drive them. They must focus, stay committed, work hard and ultimately they might become a funny car driver. But it does not happen overnight.

I see new drivers that many times put the proverbial "cart before the horse". They try to get sponsorships, interview for rides with teams or worse still go purchase an entire race car, transporter and parts having never sat in a funny car with the engine running.

Why would someone do this? They make a couple assumptions. First, they assume they'll like driving these cars because they see others that like driving them. Second, they really don't think there is any way they can't drive these cars and a quick three runs will upgrade them from a super comp license to an alcohol license and they'll be "off to the races" so to speak.

I'm being very honest when I say this. Some people simply don't like driving cars this fast... and that's okay. These cars certainly aren't for everyone. But what I think they should do is get in a car first, before they try to sell themselves to a sponsor or team owner or buy a car. At our school we can

provide new drivers this opportunity but even if they don't visit us they should get in somebody's car and see if they like it and if they have any talent.

Which brings me back to the first statement about expectations.

The best attitude when starting out on a new adventure is to try hard but don't expect instant success. Very few people become an overnight success and if you expect too much too soon you run the risk of being frustrated with your lack of success and you may end up quitting... just before you make it.

If you'd like some help setting some realistic goals for your future... give us a call at Frank Hawley's NHRA Drag Racing School... we'd love to help.