

What Are My Expectations?

Exercise: Expectations Chart

There's a famous poem by [Kenneth Koch](#) about how impossible it is to have a social life, a love life, and a productive work life. ("You Want a Social Life, With Friends.") You can have them all, of course--but probably not all at the same time.

A great way to figure out if you're on the right path--is to actually write down your expectations for the future. We all have expectations but often, we're not explicit about defining them. Make a column for each heading, and fill in your answers.

Family

I'd like to spend all Sunday with my kids.

I'd like one night out with my partner a week.

I'd like to start college funds and put [X] in them.

I need to support my parents as they age.

Work

I'd like to bill [X amount] this year.

I'd like to get closer to a senior position.

I'd like to increase my earnings by [X percent]

Infrastructure

I'd like to buy a house in the next five years.

I'd like to upgrade my apartment next year.

I'd like to move to a new city.

Life

I'd like to save 10% of my income for retirement.

I'd like to take a two-week vacation to Europe.

I'd like to see at least three plays/concerts/movies with friends.

Now, make a column called costs/time. How much will you have to save for each? How much time for family and friends do you have to give up that you currently spend working, and vice versa? What will each require from you?

For instance, can you save for college at the same time you save for a house? Can you see friends as much as you want and grow your business? Do you have the extra money required for an extended vacation, or the extra time to attend every soccer match?

Once you know your expectations and what they will cost, you can rejigger them a bit. You won't feel guilty for not meeting your own expectations--and you can't do everything--if you have a realistic plan for your life right now.

Compromise Chart

This is where compromise comes into play. You're going to need to figure out where you can compromise. What might you have to give up? What do you need to put off?

When it comes to cutting back, everyone is different: there are places where we should and shouldn't compromise. But to set expectations and figure out whether to stay or go, you have to understand what you're willing to compromise on, and what you will not compromise on. My friend Naama Bloom provides a great example: "Instead of staying in a big corporate job just because it was responsible, I realized I'd rather compromise on savings, exercise and a social life."

First, establish some non-negotiables in your work life. Be specific! Below is an example list of some typical career goals, but feel free to create your own.

Renown

I want TED Talks!

Money

I have a target salary and savings plan, and I won't budge.

Excitement and Passion

I need to be inspired by my work.

Title

My goal is to eventually have a title with a C in front of it.

Prominence In Your Field

It's important to me that my work is honored by colleagues.

Work Life Harmony

I won't sacrifice my personal time for my work.

Independence

Control over my time is non-negotiable for me.

Now, write down what you are willing to give up to achieve your goals. Again, be specific.

Social life

I can miss a few Saturday nights with my friends.

Savings

My work now is important enough to suspend future security.

Disposable income

Shoes? Starbucks? I can live without it for a while.

Where I live

My job is in Cleveland, but my heart is in New York.

And some biggies. Do these fit you now, or can you take them or leave them?

Family

I want a healthy family life, and that means the office at nine and out by five vs. I'm not focused on family right now.

Personal space

I can't be on all the time--no texting from the boss at 10 p.m. vs. I live for Slack.

Work environment

I want to be in a supportive, friendly workspace vs. I love competition--work isn't for friends.

Stability

I want a job for the long haul vs. I like to switch it up.

Self Efficacy

I'm willing to suck it up, do what other people want me to do, and manage office politics to get where I need to go vs. I need independence in my actions and schedule or I wilt on the vine.

Security

I don't mind some sleepless nights vs. Financial insecurity makes me too anxious.

Time

I'll sleep when I'm dead vs. I need lots of time and space to take care of myself.

You can also think in terms of ratios. Juliette Kayyem, Harvard professor, national security adviser, and public speaker talks about her "influence to stress ratio." (The minute I heard that, I thought, I'm stealing it!) After a day of running around in her yoga pants, she goes on CNN for 20 minutes to provide national security analysis. That is high influence to low stress!

You could also think about your ideal income to stress ratio, or your personal space to work environment ratio. Would you give up a little of one to have a lot of the other?

Once you have your list, think about your pace. What are your targets? Do you want to be management in the next five years? Start a family by 35? Buy a house next year? You don't necessarily have control over timing, but setting some specifics down will help you assess where you need to add and take away. (For instance, if you want to take a four-month trip around the world, you may need to be frugal for a year--and it's clearly not time to start a business!)