



# Disappointment is an ACTION Word!

by CLAUDETTE COOMBS

**D**isappointment is a natural part of life. We all know that and we may experience varying degrees of disappointments daily. The daily and lifetime range can be as transient as: having rain on a picnic day; to learning that we won't get that new position, classroom or resource that we wanted; as challenging as a change in health status; or as devastating as the loss of someone we love. Each new disappointment brings with it some reflection on past situations, some leftover emotion and maybe some new resentment and sadness. Despite this, we need to realize that it also brings new opportunities. If we focus on the loss that the disappointment represents, we continue to lose. We cannot change history yet we, irrationally and somewhat subconsciously, focus our energy on doing just that. We become fixated on "why?" and "what if...?". For the things that impact us most, we spend daytime, meal time and sleep time replaying scenarios, reliving the conversations and emotions, and possibly, retelling the story to whoever will listen. This focus only serves to bring us further down the dreary road of disappointment to darker destinations. Most times we come to a point where we say: "Enough of this! I have to change something!"

A colleague uses the motto: "Build a bridge and get over it". Yes, that's easy to say – but it's also an easy and useful quote to remember. It is definitely much more challenging to incorporate it into our daily thought and behaviour patterns. However, the practice and eventual habit of moving beyond a disappointment to new possibilities is well worth the work it takes to get there. Let's think about that. What are our options?

## Analyze and Understand the Situation

1. Change the past? No, by now we have explored that one enough to know that it can't be done. We can't take back the words or undo the actions of ourselves or others.
2. Reinterpret the past? This might help us feel a little better but still doesn't take away the reality of

the disappointing situation. Maybe the thief did need our money more than we did, but that doesn't help us buy our groceries or pay our bills now.

3. Refocus the present? Taking our mind off the situation may give us some reprieve, but the disappointment will eventually find a way back into our thoughts. Taking a break does provide some mental relief and allows us the opportunity to consider another perspective, but escape only works until we have nowhere else to run, or we can't get to sleep!

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**“Whether we call it a lesson or not, we can learn a lot from past disappointments. We learn about people, situations and most of all, we learn about ourselves.”**

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4. Plan for a different future? This option is essential if we intend to move beyond the disappointment in a healthy way. Life happens. Things go wrong. We aren't perfect. Now that we have those truths out in the open, what's next? Look for the hints that let us know that there are some things over which we have some control. Ignoring the disappointment or blaming it on others takes away our ability to do anything differently next time. We may, or may not, have been able to avoid the situation but, if nothing else, we always have the opportunity to adjust our response to it.

## Develop an Action Plan

Action is necessary. Passively waiting for time to heal our wounds, leaves the end result outside the realm of our influence. That's not where we want it to be! The proposed action may take considerable energy, mental effort and consistent determination. How do we maintain that drive when it would be simpler and easier to just quit? The motivation is in the end prod-

uct. Imagine the new, more positive, desirable result. When you mentally compare your negative present to the positive potential, the new image will always win. Don't be side-tracked into reflecting on the "good old days" or that time before the disappointment or loss. We have already established that we can't change history. We cannot bring back that moment. We only have the power to move through the present into a future in which we direct our attitudes and actions. If we are successful, over time we will have created a new past that we can reflect on with satisfaction.

If the situation could have been prevented by us, clarify how. What might have helped: better communication skills? improved time management? self protection strategies? additional resources? involving other people? You decide. It is time to identify something over which we have some control or influence. The next step is planning for a future which is different from our past, or even different from our present experience. What do we want instead of this? Plan "A" , or even the backup Plan "B", might not be enough to carry you through some situations. Be prepared to look for a Plan "C" or whatever it takes to recover from a serious disappointment.

If the situation could not have been prevented or avoided by us, could the personal impact have been minimized? How? Look realistically at relationships, the environment, personal skills and resources to determine where to find the supports we need. Cultivate those supports now, so we are in a better position to adequately deal with emotional challenges in the future.

### Stay Committed

Although we need to know intellectually what is needed, a critical component of moving forward and taking responsibility for protecting our well-being, is our attitude. Two people can experience the same type of disappointment and the same level of loss in their lives, yet one is able to recover and find new pleasures, joy and purpose while the other is not. While one creatively explores alternatives, the other focuses on what is missing. This alone is enough to predict who will make a mentally healthy recovery. Adopting a positive approach automatically excludes the negativity inherent in disappointment. Since we are unable to concurrently hold the two opposing energies within our minds or bodies, we can use this fact of nature, to our advantage. Also, since our behaviours follow our thoughts, we must be sure to have our thoughts clearly focused on the success we want to experience, not on the perceived failures of the past.

**W**e may, or may not believe that things happen for a purpose. That dilemma is tangential to the fact that "things happen"! Now that they have, we choose what we are going to do about them. Becoming solution-focused encourages us to assume a constructive attitude rather than succumb to negativity and pessimism. Whether we call it a lesson or not, we can learn a lot from past disappointments. We learn about people, situations and most of all, we learn about ourselves. As teachers, we like to take advantage of all "teachable moments". Let's not waste our own!

Remember that bridge? Let's visit the lumber yard – we may be in need of another supply.

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*Claudette Coombs is an EAP Coordinator with the Employee Assistance Program for teachers. For confidential assistance contact Claudette Coombs (ext. 242) or Marie Wall (ext. 265).*

## Employee Assistance Program

### Counselling Services

Are you teaching in a rural community? Do you feel that you need someone to speak with but think that counselling is too far away?

- Counselling Services are available throughout all of Newfoundland and Labrador.
- Telephone, computer and video conferencing can be confidentially and effectively utilized to assist you.

If you wish to enquire further, please contact one of your EAP Coordinators:

**Marie Wall, 1-800-563-3599, ext. 265,**  
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