

## Quality #2: Goals and Expectations Imagined Catastrophe

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# Intentional Creation

OG MANDINO FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

## Imagined Catastrophe

When we fantasize it is inevitable that we will experience the polar opposite, imagined catastrophe. When life shows up differently from our fantasy, and it always does, we can engage in obsessive worrying, endlessly thinking about every worse-case scenario known to humankind - plus a few. Og calls it, "Tormenting myself over events that may never come to pass."

Again, systemic thoughts are dualistic - no gray, no spectrum or gradation. When an expectation, a concrete condition for happiness, is threatened, a systemic thought will automatically go from "everything is perfect" to "everything is horrible" - worse case scenarios. This is called catastrophizing or pessimistic thinking. Systemic thoughts have no other mathematical choice.

To further complicate the dualistic nature of a systemic thought, the very real physiological reactions that are simultaneously occurring at the cellular level in the body serve only as a confirmation that our worst fears are real. These molecule-driven emotions of anxiety, fearfulness, and stress can be misinterpreted by our intuition. As a result we risk the possibility of reading into these feelings much more than are actually happening and then acting upon this "false intuition."

If we get caught in this tsunami of emotions, we can turn a molehill into a mountain in a moment.

*Have you ever been given a small piece of information (a glance, smile, frown, phone call, email, comment, gossip) and from that small piece of information written a feature film script about what it "really" means, what is "really" happening?*

*If so, have you ever reacted based on this "false intuitive feeling" believing it was accurate?*

*How often have you discovered that it was not as it appeared (not as good, not as serious)?*

*Do you ever find yourself apologizing for these reactions?*

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An unknown author suggests that the word FEAR is an acronym. Fill in the blanks:

F \_\_\_\_\_

E \_\_\_\_\_

A \_\_\_\_\_

R \_\_\_\_\_

The false evidence is the cortisol and fear dendrites that are autonomically released when our expectations are challenged. This false evidence heightens our negative or pessimistic thoughts driving additional releases of these “molecules of emotion.” This cycle of having an expectation threatened by tangible reality, the release of molecules, and the resultant emotions and feelings of anxiety can seem very real. The basis for these escalating negative thoughts that create this release is not real.

Neuroscientists suggest that this could be one of the most difficult times to be conscious and aware of people and the complexity of situations. The metabolic energy has been robbed from the area of the brain that supports higher levels of consciousness. Our hippocampus, our memory center, has been locked down or severely blunted. Our body feels tense and anxious. We have been prepared for war.

*Have you ever experienced this level of fear? If so, please share.*

*Have you ever over-reacted only to regret it later? If so, please share.*

*Have you ever wounded anyone when this occurs? If so and if comfortable, please share.*

*What prices can we pay for this often pervasive and potentially chronic and destructive seed of fantasy?*

Imagine. It's 5 PM on a Friday. You get one of “those emails” or voice messages that cause a lightning bolt of anxiety and fear to wash over you.

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*Do you know the feeling?*

You want to find out what is going on and attempt to connect with the person but discover that he or she has left for the weekend and will not be available until 8 AM on Monday.

*What could it be?*

*Why do they seem so angry or accusatory?*

*Tell me about your weekend.*

*How emotionally available will you be for family and friends?*

*How many negative scenarios will you play out over the next 60 hours?*

*Are you ever tempted to engage in a manhunt in an effort to track down the person and get to the bottom of this challenge?*

*Ever spent a weekend worrying, endlessly playing out every possible scenario?*

*How often are these imagined outcomes negative?*

*How often do worse case scenarios actually play out in the tangible world?*

It's 8 AM Monday morning. You call and confront your accuser only to discover that you misread or misunderstood the message.

*What happens when it all turns out okay?*

*Have you ever had a worse-case scenario actually happen?*

*Did that "right cross" knock you off your feet like mine did me?*

*Did it hurt so bad that it left you determined to be prepared to block any blow and from any direction?*

*How much time can we waste worrying about worse case scenarios?*

Dr. Don Kennedy, a family physician and one of our coaches, reports that the majority of health challenges being faced by his geriatric patients can be traced back to a lifetime of

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obsessive worrying – catastrophizing - and the resultant chronic release of cortisol. Studies support his findings. Dan Goleman, in his seminal work, Social Intelligence, reports that chronic doses of cortisol contribute to health challenges such as immune deficiency disease, hypertension, and exacerbation of diabetes.

When we are in this “war ready” emotional state, we can say and do things that we might later regret. It is very difficult to be aware of and be sensitive to the needs of others when we are experiencing these chemical reactions. We can also waste a lot of time.

*How many hours in the day might you find if you made the commitment to never catastrophize again?*