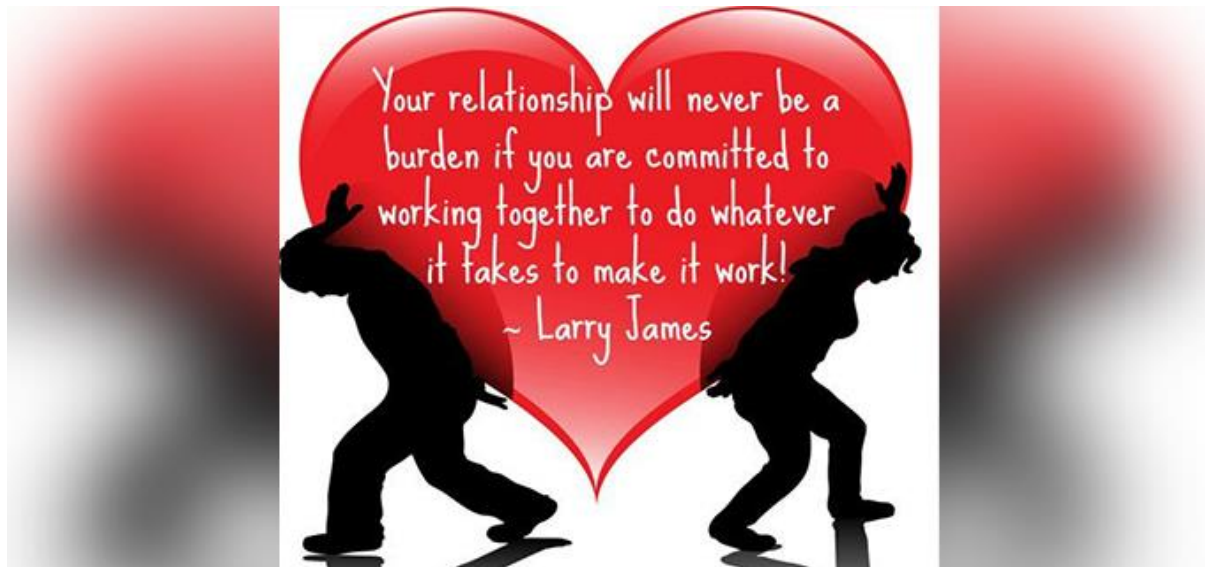


“The Burden of Togetherness: When Love Turns into Burden”

- Prof Arun Sehgal, Visiting Faculty, JBIMS, University of Mumbai



I authored this article after seeing the breakdown of many loving relationships between start-up founders as their businesses scaled. In the early stages, love and passion for both their relationship and the business seemed to flourish. However, as the demands of scaling the enterprise grew, so did the expectations within their personal relationships—often leading to tension, frustration, and eventually, the collapse of what was once a strong bond. Making money is important but equally important is the wisdom to know what money cannot buy. Loving relationships, peace of mind, respect and health are few such things.

In the first stages of love, everything feels magical. The air seems lighter, smiles linger longer, and the presence of the other person brings an inexplicable joy. This is the phase where love thrives on mutual affection, excitement, and the desire to make each other happy. As love deepens, however, so do expectations. What starts as an innocent wish to please can evolve into an unspoken set of demands that grow exponentially over time, often without either partner noticing. When these expectations go unchecked, they can erode the very foundation of the relationship, leading to frustration, resentment, and, the end of love.

The Silent Growth of Expectations

Expectations are a natural part of any relationship. We all have certain needs and desires that we hope our partner will fulfil. Initially, these expectations may be small—simple gestures like spending quality time together, remembering special dates, or offering support during tough times. But as the relationship progresses, the

expectations can grow silently. Without open communication, they can become more complex, sometimes morphing into unrealistic demands that the other person may not even be aware of.

This silent growth is dangerous because it often happens subconsciously. One partner might start expecting more attention, more sacrifices, or a deeper emotional commitment without ever voicing these desires. Over time, these unspoken expectations can pile up, creating an invisible burden that the relationship may not be able to bear.

The Trap of Unmet Expectations

Unmet expectations are one of the leading causes of conflict in relationships. When one partner begins to expect more than the other is willing or able to give, resentment starts to build. The partner with the unmet expectations might feel unappreciated, unloved, or taken for granted, while the other partner may feel overwhelmed, confused, or pressured. This disconnect can lead to a vicious cycle where both partners withdraw emotionally, communication breaks down, and the relationship suffers.

The key problem lies in the fact that expectations often grow without the knowledge of the other person. One partner might assume that their desires are obvious or that their needs should naturally be met. However, love does not grant anyone the ability to read minds. Without open and honest communication, expectations remain hidden, and when they go unmet, disappointment takes over. Over time, this disappointment can turn into bitterness, and the relationship starts to sour.

The Illusion of Fairness

Many people fall into the trap of believing that their expectations are justified because they have invested time, energy, and love into the relationship. They may feel that because they have given so much, they deserve to have their needs met in return. This sense of fairness can create a sense of entitlement, where one partner believes they are owed certain things—whether it's emotional support, affection, or even material comfort.

However, relationships are not transactional. Love is not about keeping score or tallying up what you have given versus what you have received. When expectations are built on this illusion of fairness, they become a heavy burden on the other person. This often leads to feelings of obligation, rather than genuine love, and can suffocate the spontaneity and joy that once defined the relationship.

The Danger of Unrealistic Expectations

As expectations grow, they can eventually become unrealistic. For example, expecting your partner to be your constant source of happiness, fulfillment, and security is not only unrealistic, but also unfair. No one person can meet all of your needs, and placing that kind of pressure on your partner is a surefire way to strain the relationship.

Unrealistic expectations often stem from insecurities, past experiences, or societal pressures. You may expect your partner to behave in a certain way based on what you've seen in movies, read in books, or observed in other couples. However, every relationship is unique, and trying to force your partner to meet these idealized standards can lead to frustration and disappointment.

Recognizing the Line Between Reality and Fantasy

One of the biggest challenges in any relationship is recognizing when expectations cross the line from reasonable to unrealistic. This line is often blurry and can vary from person to person. What one partner considers a reasonable request might feel overwhelming to the other. For example, expecting your partner to always be available, to anticipate your needs, or to make sacrifices without question may seem like natural desires, but they may be far from realistic.

It is crucial to regularly assess your expectations and ask yourself whether they are fair, reasonable, and achievable. Are you expecting your partner to be someone they're not? Are you asking for things that go beyond what is healthy or sustainable in the relationship? These are tough questions, but they are essential for maintaining a healthy balance between love and expectations.

Communication: The Lifeline of Relationships

The most effective way to prevent expectations from destroying a relationship is through open and honest communication. It's important to express your needs and desires clearly, while also being receptive to your partner's feelings and limitations. Avoid assuming that your partner knows what you want or how you feel. Instead, create a safe space for dialogue, where both of you can share your thoughts and expectations without fear of judgment or criticism.

It's also important to listen actively and empathetically to your partner's needs. Relationships are a two-way street, and just as you have expectations, your partner does too. By fostering an environment of mutual understanding and respect, you can prevent unrealistic expectations from festering and ensure that both partners feel heard and valued.

Things to Avoid Before Expectations Kill the Relationship

To safeguard your relationship from the destructive power of unmet expectations, there are several key things to avoid:

1. Avoid assuming your partner knows what you want: No one can read minds. Always communicate your desires clearly.

2. Avoid comparing your relationship to others: Every relationship is unique, and comparing yours to others can lead to unrealistic expectations and dissatisfaction.
3. Avoid placing all your happiness in your partner: Your partner is not responsible for your happiness. Make sure you maintain your own sources of fulfillment outside the relationship.
4. Avoid keeping score: Love is not about tallying who gives more or who sacrifices the most. Instead of keeping score, focus on the joy of giving without expecting something in return.
5. Avoid ignoring your partner's limitations: Recognize that your partner is human, with their own needs, limitations, and challenges. Expecting perfection will only lead to disappointment.
6. Avoid making ultimatums: Using ultimatums to force your partner to meet your expectations is a recipe for resentment. Instead, have open discussions about your needs and find a compromise.

Conclusion: Nurturing Love Without Unrealistic Expectations

Love is a delicate balance between giving and receiving, and expectations will always play a role in any relationship. However, when those expectations grow unchecked, they can become toxic. The key to avoiding the death of a relationship lies in maintaining realistic expectations, communicating openly, and fostering mutual understanding. By being mindful of the expectations you place on your partner—and ensuring they are reasonable—you can preserve the love that brought you together in the first place and create a relationship that thrives on respect, empathy, and shared growth.

Ultimately, love is not about having all your expectations met—it's about growing together, adapting to each other's needs, and finding joy in the shared journey, not just in the destination.