



HEY LEADER: WHOSE EXPECTATIONS ARE YOU TRYING TO MEET?

✧ · by [Carlann Fergusson](#) · in [Authentic Leadership](#), [Emotionally Intelligent Leadership](#), [Leadership Lessons](#)

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Sometimes, a question can strike you with such clarity that it remains with you for life.

The following question was posed to me early in my management career and is one that has **provided deep insight** up until this day:

“Whose expectations are you trying to meet?”

The Super Syndrome

After another exhausting week, I attended a community seminar based on the [Superwoman Syndrome](#) by Marjorie Hansen Shaevitz. this seminar’s topic referred to women holding themselves to unrealistic expectations to simultaneously be the best career women, mothers, spouses, community members , etc.

Today it could easily be the **Superman & Superwoman Syndrome** as advertising and media routinely throws images of being the best parent, partner, leader, global conscious servant, etc. Just look at Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie.

If they can raise their kids, solve world issues, be block buster professionals and stand by each other why can’t we all?

Just forget that they are **exhausted** and have a **few personal challenges**.

Getting Really Real

Eventually Something Has to Give

At work everyone wants something from you: **your boss, your peers, internal customers, external customers, the Board, the stockholders.**

They all act as if “No” is not an option.

But in the real world, if you treat all their expectations as equal, then you will most certainly burn out and never meet many of your stated goals. The old adage “you can’t please everyone” is true.

If you try to meet everyone’s expectations at least one of those attempts will result in lower than anticipated quality and both of you won’t be feeling too great about the outcome.

If you can’t physically and mentally do it all, what is going to move to a lower priority? If you let your stakeholders define this for you, you will continue in the land of the **tyranny of the urgent**. Whatever is the next thing screaming for attention will get your time.

Gaining Real Focus

Stop the Spinning

If you are already spinning from the **long list of things** you supposedly “have to do,” then your response to my advice to take time to analyze your work is going to be “but I don’t have time.”

Which is more painful; making time to narrow your focus and be able to say “no” to some requests, or continuing to spin at the pace you are at?

In all likelihood if you continue without taking a **more strategic view** your pace of spinning will increase because the number of people asking you for support will increase. By always saying “yes” you have reinforced them and others that you will always be there to help regardless of the request.

You have essentially created your own problem.

Getting Real Results

Get Out the Pen and Paper

List all the activities you are doing and the ones you anticipate doing this year.

- Which of these services, products, activities are essential to the company meeting it's vision?
 - Which of these am I the sole source for (no one else in the company can provide this)?
- Which activities, products, services are not related to the vision?
 - What drives me to provide each of these activities, products or services?
 - What could happen if I stopped providing these?
 - What would really happen if I stopped providing these (75%+ confidence that it would occur)?
 - What could I, my key stakeholders and my company gain if I stopped these activities?
 - Which of these gains are of higher value than the activity itself? (this will serve as your compelling reason to stop offering this service or support)

Gaining Real Perspective

Letting Go

If you are still reluctant to take something off your plate that is not of high value, ask yourself these questions:

- What **personal need**(s) does providing this service or activity fulfill?
- What makes this need so **compelling for me**?
- Is there another way to fulfill this need with the **more critical activities, products or services**?

Here is a great example:

Jack is in a support function. He spends 2 hours each week in one of his key stakeholders staff meetings. He started attending to learn more about the stakeholder's business and to be present in case some need related to his function was raised. Rarely does this need show up. He already has learned about his stakeholder's business but he keeps attending for reasons of visibility, status and perceived customer service.

After doing the exercise he realizes that spending the 2 hours each week on the projects directly tied to the vision, will bring him greater visibility. He talks to the senior leader about his rationale for no longer attending and offers to set up a 15-minute monthly check in meeting to ensure their needs are met.

Three months later, Jack's increased quality and creativity on the strategic project is gaining him visibility at the executive level and meeting his personal desire for greater status.

Gaining Real Satisfaction

Expectations vs. Vision

Shifting from trying to **meet everyone's expectations** to meeting the **company's vision** and **your personal vision** will keep you a valued asset to the business and yourself.

Whenever someone asks you to do something, instead of immediately answering yes, respond that you need time to assess priority.

So how has this process, or something similar, or something different helped you to manage your time and energy? Have you changed to become more realistic in setting appropriate expectations? What can you do in the future to better examine your personal set of expectations and use that model to better understand and help others? I would love to hear your thoughts!

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Carlann Fergusson is owner at Propel Forward LLC

She provides seminars and consulting on Strategic Leadership Challenges

[Email](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Web](#) | Skype: carlann.fergusson