

Anticipation does not = outcome

For attorneys this is a truism. NO matter what you anticipate from a judge or jury, you cannot count on it and would be foolish to do so. You wait to see what the outcome of a hearing is before you respond. Your clients may feel the excited anticipation that you have done a great job and that they will win; but you know from long experience not to plan anything based on an *anticipated* outcome.

Then why would attorneys who have that principle down pat, do exactly the opposite in depression? It is one of the very challenging aspects of depression that people anticipate failure, sadness, loss, disappointment and negative outcomes and immediately *feel and act as if that is what will happen*. Two outcomes from this way of handling anticipation:

One possibility is the outcome is positive but you are still in a bad mood and you take the good feeling away from yourself, sarcastically saying something like, "Sure, this time it was not so bad, but how often does that happen?" And you keep on anticipating negative outcomes. And, just try to feel good about *not* being disappointed if you have been preparing yourself to be disappointed. Switching gears is just too hard.

The other and most likely possibility is that you have invited the negative outcome. You might bluster about who would want a negative outcome, but if you search your depressed self, you will see that YOU feel more comfortable if outcomes remain negative. You know how to handle that. Many an attorney does well at work, driven by fear of negative outcomes to hard work, stellar preparation, and careful attention to detail. Clients appreciate that! But your fear prevents you from relishing your work and blocks joy and delight at the outcome. Rather, you fear that if you let up even a smidgeon of effort, all will come crashing down around you. So no matter how much better you get with experience, how competent you become, you continue to feel as if your skill won't matter. Depression blocks you from feeling competent, it stops you from optimism.

Worse, even though you see success at work (and continue to work long hours to ensure it) you may invite loss, disappointment and negativity in personal relationships. Whether it is with a spouse, with your children or with your friendships, you may see yourself letting those go, anticipating that people will not love or support you. Believing you won't get the love you want, you set in motion the isolation you fear. You become crabby, drown your free time in work (where you feel safer) and when others complain or move on to activities without you, you are more isolated and more depressed, believing you do not deserve the fun and warmth of a good family life or friendship network.

If this sounds a bit like you, consider applying a standard principle of legal practice to your depression. Anticipation does not equal outcome. Try in small ways to anticipate success. Try to imagine that the neighborhood BBQ will have moments of laughter (not another drudgery of aimless chit-chat), try to see your child's soccer game as a chance for fresh air and bonding time (even though you know it will be far from exciting athleticism) or tell yourself your friends *want* you to show up at the birthday lunch and you

will be a valuable addition to the event (because even though you cannot see what they like about you, they did invite you!)

And, just as you do not carry out legal responses until you know the outcome of a trial or a hearing, you will diminish your depression if you do not plan to be disappointed, mad or cynical until a situation calls for it. For now, imagine what you might do if it all works out well! There will be plenty of time to get depressed later, if that is necessary.