

Sometimes it is hard not to feel very, very bad about something that you cannot fix. Why is that any different than being depressed? I think it has something to do with perspective. Last week I got a piece of bad news. My dear friend lost her job, and I could not do a darned thing to help her beyond listen to her. I felt very worried about her prospects to get another job and I know finances are tight so she cannot afford a lengthy job hunt. I literally felt sick. But I was not depressed. I did not go into a downward spiral of misery. And that got me to thinking.

How does it work that I could avoid feeling depressed when even a bit of trouble can send a depressed person into a pit?

I think it has a lot to do with perspective and expectations. When people have depression, their brain chemistry makes it very, very hard to get into a positive network of thoughts. The brain balance tips toward negativity and makes it extremely hard to see options. Literally it is like falling into a pit and seeing darkness all around and that light up at the top is fairly dim. Their perspective is tunnel-like and does not open up a network of hope and options.

My perspective, not being in a pit, saw options for me and also for my friend, limited though they might have been. I quickly decided that I cannot find her a job. I can, if she gets into serious financial straits, offer her some help. Other than that, I can encourage her. That is all I can do but it is what I can do. So, having decided that, dwelling on her difficulties made me feel worse and won't help her a bit. For my sake, I have to turn my mind away from thinking about it whenever it comes up.

So how does a person in a pit get that perspective? *You need other people to broaden your perspective.* I am not suggesting that you get falsely optimistic. Realism is needed to stay focused and correctly effortful when facing trouble. But feeling hopeless undermines not only effort but ability to see options. I have several clients who are job searching, and I observe how depression leads them to overlook possibilities and to be slow in pursuing options. They need the eyes of others to see the possibilities, but once they take an action with a positive result, they begin to climb out of the pit. Encouragement from others is like a rope that pulls you up, getting you closer to the top of the pit where you can see light more clearly.

What about expectations? I knew that my friend would immediately begin searching for work, and I chose not to repeat the low expectation mantra, "In this economy...." ad nauseum. I expect her efforts will find success, even if not immediately. I chose to tell myself that while some people have trouble finding work, there are still more people working than not working, and she could be one of them. I don't have connections in her field of work, but she does. Those expectations are the opposite of depressed negativity.

You may wonder why I should worry about depression when it is my friend who lost work. In depression, many things can trigger a downward slide, and fear for someone else can trigger fear and low expectations about one's own future. If she can lose a job, so can I. and I can, as many do, enter into the whole negative look at U.S. economy and politics and in time work myself right down into an expectation that things are really bad and will never improve. One of my clients recently gave me about a 10 minute rant on

If you expect to fail, your actions tend to lead toward failure. “Expect success and you invite success” is an old saw that a depressed person shrugs off.