



LYLE'S LAWS

Lyle's Law of Expectations

SOME YEARS AGO, I WAS ASKED to serve as master of ceremonies at my high-school reunion. One of the features of the program was a letter from the man who had been our football coach when we were seniors, and it fell to me to read the letter to the assembled classmates. Coach Sam either had a great memory or a good scrapbook because he listed the starting lineup of the 1952 season. So, of course, I read it.

Center, Kucera. Quarterback, Doran.
Right end, Porter. Bench, Feisel.

Well, he didn't really say that about Feisel, but I thought I should insert it before one of my less-gracious classmates asked where Lyle fit in the lineup. The fact is that I was a less-than-outstanding football player. I believe that several factors contributed to this. For one thing, I was a farm boy and didn't get started in football until I was in high school. For another, I had an aversion to avoidable bodily pain, a condition that exists to this day. Mostly, however, I think my lackluster performance was due to the fact that I never did visualize myself as a great football player. As I ran the plays in my head, I didn't see myself as the hero of the game or even an important contributor. I think it would have helped if I had been able to run some scenarios that took me through the plays and put me in the starring position. It would have been better had I expected to be good. This principle is summed up in the two-part Lyle's Law of Expectations: *Model success. Expect the best.*

Airplane pilots of the amateur variety do this. A pilot friend of mine once told me that he shot landings in his head, visualizing the ground coming up to meet him, the end of the runway passing under the plane, and, finally, the plane leveling just before the wheels touched the surface. As these events occurred, he was busy visualizing his actions, managing pitch, roll, and yaw, adjusting the throttle, and monitoring the instruments as the aircraft responded to his inputs. And of course, every landing was perfect. He did the drill over and over and, by modeling success, came to expect that he would do it just right and the people on the side of the field would cheer.

Sales people follow this law. A successful sales person will visualize the introduction, the approach, the rationale, the objection, the rebuttal, the pitch, and, finally, the sale. In their mental model, they always make the sale. That is, they expect the best to happen. And they act as if the best is going to happen. You won't hear a

good sales person start a sales call by saying, "I don't suppose you'd care to buy ..."

This law is useful in the design process. A designer can start by visualizing a product that is able to do all the things one could possibly desire in such a product. Usually, then, one good visualization leads to another. The thumbwheel on my cell phone rolls up and down, pushes in, pushes forward, and pushes backward—five degrees of freedom. I'm pretty sure that in the first visualization, it had only one. But hey! Let's dream a little.

As the design process continues, the designer can visualize individual circuits, mechanisms, processes, etc.,—not from the standpoint of how they work, but how

they perform. With this input, what is the ideal output? Visualize the thing working in the best possible way and then expect that you will be able to build it to provide that kind of performance. Model success. Expect the best. And then go to work.

In management, this law is absolutely essential. I am very fortunate to be a member of the board of directors of a company founded by one of my former students. What a pleasure it is to be around Bob and his colleagues.

They share a marvelous vision of this company as a world leader in its field with a mission to make our world safer and to maintain a high growth rate, the confidence of its customers, and the support of its investors. Bob, in particular, has in his head a model of what the company can achieve and the expectation that it will do so. And it will.

*Model success.
Expect the best.*

In visualizing your model, don't make it utopian. As a matter of fact, one of the benefits of modeling success is doing so while integrating adversity into the model. My pilot friend would visualize landing in a cross wind or a rainstorm or at night. He would imagine engine failure at 500 feet. But always he modeled a successful landing. And all the people would cheer.

So as you create scenarios, put in the bad things as well as the good. Then model your way out of the negative situation into a successful conclusion. Imagine a part failing in one of your designs. Then visualize yourself



fixing the part and the problem and preventing it from happening again. Imagine yourself in front of a hostile audience explaining and defending an action they don't like. Conjure up their objections and model your response. See yourself doing it calmly and logically and with sensitivity to the feelings of the audience and finally winning their support. Then when you have done the modeling of success, go do the real thing with an expectation that the best will happen.

Of course this law, like most, has its limitations. I can visualize myself as a great singing basketball player 'till the Queen of England pays a visit, but I'll still sing like Michael Jordan and shoot baskets like Michael Jackson. (Note in passing: I almost wrote, "till the cows come home," but that isn't long enough. If you know cows, you'll know that they do come home—twice a day.) Your model has to be realistic but positive. No matter what the adversity, you need to see yourself as succeeding, and then expect to experience that success.

The Law of Expectations applies to football, to flying, to sailing, to design, to management, and to many other things. Above all, it applies to life. Certainly you should not spend all of your time modeling and visualizing. You have to spend most of your time doing, whether you are doing work or doing play or doing relationships. But some time spent modeling successful work or play or relationships will help you build confidence. And the expectation of success will help you to be successful. So construct in your mind a model of yourself being a success in your profession, enjoying and excelling in your sports and leisure activities, and being a caring and supportive person to your friends and family and even to people you don't know. Then expect that you will truly be a success in doing all those things. Chances are that you will.

—Lyle D. Feisel, Ph.D., P.E.,
Iowa Alpha '61



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