



## Here's looking at you kid

**By Stuart White**  
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When you are in your teens and 20s image is everything. You are very self-conscious, agonising over your appearance, craving acceptance and overly concerned about what people think about you. When you reach your 30s, you decide you don't really care that much about other people's opinions, you're just going to do your own thing. And by the time you get into your 40s, you discover the devastating real truth: Nobody ever gave any of it a second thought – they had other things on their mind.

I wish I had known this all along – boy, would it have saved me so much trouble, and nowhere more so than when applying it to dealing with rejection. It doesn't matter if you are a 12 year old pubescent girl rejected by her first crush, or a 45 year old job applicant who's received a "your application has been unsuccessful" letter - it's hard to hear the underlying message - we don't want you, we don't love you, you are just not good enough! For many of us hearing this, justified or not, leaves us devastated, and regardless of how many brushes with it we have throughout our life, we never seem to get used to it.

Rejection comes in many forms and faces with a myriad differing repercussions. Top of the list for me is unrequited love, oh my God, a pain that feels greater than open-heart surgery without anaesthetic. What is it about loving someone and then not having it returned? And what about social rejection when you just don't fit in and are ostracised for being different? It may be physical, cultural or peer rejection, but whatever the reason, the emotional impact can be enormous – even obsessive or violent.

I think it's interesting to see how people react to rejection. A huge part of my business deals with receiving hundreds of applications for jobs. The relationship between the number of people applying for jobs and the number of opportunities out there is horribly skewed so it's inevitable that 99% of the people who apply will be unsuccessful. A standard letter may read something like "Thank you for your interest... We have reviewed your resume... blah blah blah... we have decided to pursue other candidates for the position." But obviously the more invested the person becomes in their application the more time is taken to give the rejection so that they will get, maybe, a phone call or a discussion specifically designed to reject the person in the kindest and most positive way possible.

This is just normal practice, even in matters of the heart. If you have been dating for a few hours (teenage girls stuff) a simple status change on Facebook from involved to single can suffice to reject your one short-lived boyfriend. A few weeks requires at least an sms. Months is generally accepted as meriting a face-to-face rejection, whilst if you have a few years on the clock, it's could be a supper date – if you dare risk doing it in public.

The real problem of course is that when we do not cope with rejection it's either because we are getting caught up in the past or refusing to go forward. With job applicants I see this the whole time. Too much past, and the response is "I am never successful, this always happens to me, what's wrong with me?, etc. Defeated applicants find ways to replay old negative "I am not good enough" tapes to reinforce their "give up" attitude. In contrast, people who view rejection as an integral part of life have a tendency to shrug their shoulders and look forward – failing to micro-analyse and torture themselves about what went wrong.. Self esteem still intact, they march forward head held high with the intrinsic knowledge that things will get better, all is not lost, and the sun will indeed come out tomorrow. Most successful artists are like this – almost all have tales of the many doors that were slammed in their face before they gained acceptance and it's a combination of talent, determination and above all, self-belief that kept them going, knocking on yet another door till it was eventually opened.

And here is the key. Maslow's hierarchy of needs lists sense of belonging as one of our basic needs. We crave acceptance as human beings, whether it's for our personality, looks, skills or ability. The irony of course is that acceptance comes from self and not from others. When we are comfortable in our own skin with who we are and what we have, what others think of us becomes less important and powerless to crush us. Rejection is fear-based and lives mostly in our minds. When we start believing in ourselves we become empowered and begin to realise that rejection can be positive. The message is not that we aren't loved or wanted, just that we aren't loved or wanted by the right person or people. So in this instance you weren't successful - big deal. There's a better person or a bigger opportunity waiting round the corner – you just haven't turned it yet!

It's just like the wonderfully liberating realisation that after all that youthful agony of self-consciousness, followed by more mature blasé bravado to show how little we care, we finally discover that no-one was taking much notice anyway – well, no-one who really mattered, that is!

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