
THE PATH OF THE PERPETUAL EFF-UP (IS NOT THE ONLY PATH)



Sketch by Justin Hunt

The Set-Up

You finally gather up the courage to pursue a friend you've liked romantically for a long time. You start dropping lines indicating your interest and you're pleased to find that he/she seems receptive.

So, after a month, you take the leap and invite him/her to do something...just the two of you and you're paying (read: yes, this is a date).

He/she accepts.

Euphoria!

The day of the date arrives and you get this text: "I forgot my aunt is coming into town...won't be able to meet up tonight. [insert obligatory frowny emoji here]"

You're crushed knowing that this is probably some B.S., gentle way of rejecting you. But you scrape together every last ounce of self-respect you can muster and persist. You ask when he/she can reschedule.

No response...AKA the tacit rejection that burns your soul.

With that, you know again that life is actually just a long parade of perpetual disappointments designed to remind you of the *fact* that:

(a) you are an idiot,

(b) you're unworthy of being liked and especially of being loved,

(c) you are a burden or, at the very least, a waste of space to all who know you.

The Eff-Up Path

This echo-chamber of self-hating banter is the clearest sign that you have begun down a path I'll call "The Path of the Perpetual Eff-Up" (or just The Eff-Up Path). This well-worn path quells our anxieties about the inherent unknowns of life because the destination is clear: misery and despair.

Depressing...but soothingly predictable.

Traveling down this path also provides the illusion of having total control mostly because it leads to a place where you can believe you don't actually need people. After all, you definitely don't need anyone else in order to meet the expectation that life sucks and you are shit. But wanting and risking closeness with others is another story...So don't look over there!

When you auto-pilot down The Path of the Perpetual Eff-Up you may even have a way of taking on all of the sins of the world while absolving everyone else and turning them into saints. So, for every horrible thing you attribute to yourself (e.g., I am an idiot), you assign an equally powerful, positive attribute to the other (e.g., he/she is a genius, super-god, sex-machine, who would never have been caught dead dating the likes of me).

You dehumanize yourself (and the now idealized other) for the purpose of making life orderly and controllable once again. You can

hardly blame yourself for retreating in such a way when you just took the risk of putting yourself out there as a human only to find yourself in a position where you were hurt profoundly by someone else's humanity.

At the risk of spoiling your depressive high...

What if, instead of carrying on down this path of self-hatred, you let yourself make a different turn? A turn away from the safety of *knowing* that your life is *always* gonna suck precisely because you're an inherent eff-up.

Let's go back to when the tacit rejection happened. There was actually a fork in the road there that you may have missed. Maybe it scared you too much to look at.

You rarely let yourself see the smaller, foliage-covered path that springs from the ever-illuminated Eff-Up Path because—even though it means veering away from a life of perpetual self-hatred—it leads to territory where less is known and where the illusion of omnipotent control is largely diminished.

In truth, the unknowns and fears associated with walking down an alternative path can be so fraught and overwhelming that we are unlikely to do it without someone by our side. Psychotherapy can be critical in facilitating understanding around the myriad reasons you may feel inexplicably tied to the Eff-Up Path and can, by

extension, make seeing and then stepping onto a new path more feasible.

But what does walking down this shady, alternative path entail and why go over there?

It's the path where you are not simply the devil in a world of saints; where there is a possibility that this guy/girl you were trying to pursue has their own problems and that this is not just about you sucking.

Accepting this simple but hugely loaded notion means proceeding as if you and the other are *still human* even after the calamitous rejection. Maintaining the other's humanity preserves the possibility that any number of things was going on for them which contributed to their seeming passivity. Things like: this person is scared of commitment because he/she has been hurt too OR this person does not know how to tell me what concerns they have about dating me because they feel that the only way to be acceptable in life is to proceed as if you like everything about everyone (oh damn...maybe this person has a Perpetual Eff-Up Path which absolves everyone else of their sins too!).

In short, preserving the other's humanity may help you to recognize that their non-response is not an outright rejection of your soul.

But regardless of what's going on with that person, this alternative path also requires that you maintain *your own* humanity. This

likely means experiencing a sense of rage toward that person for thwarting your efforts to be closer to them. (Important aside: this is targeted rage which now won't have to be displaced onto yourself or unsuspecting/undeserving others.) On this still-human path, you're not just an idiot-monster-thing, which means you will also likely experience a sense of loss and sadness in putting yourself out there and not getting what it was that you wanted so profoundly from the other.

The payoff: if you can actually touch your grief in this way, you will also be able to experience self-compassion; the belief that you —A HUMAN BEING—have just been hurt and that you *deserve* comfort from yourself and others at moments like these.

The Point

Any form of perceived rejection—be it friend stuff, work stuff, romantic stuff, etc—will likely bring up this fork in the road. Resorting to the Eff-Up Path of hopelessness and self-hatred is understandable and is itself quite human in that it springs from our desire to protect ourselves through an illusion of omnipotent control.

But try to remember that there is another path. With the courage to walk down it, you might just find a life worth living.