

From Blame to Responsibly—the Key to Power and Empowerment

A powerful exercise is to look at what and how we blame. The faults we find in others are often indicators of what we need to look at in ourselves. If we are willing, we can use what we are upset about as a reflection to help us identify and own some aspect of ourselves that we are denying or have not recognized before.

We are responsible for our impact. Others are responsible for their impact. The more of our impact we recognize and take responsibility for, the more empowered we become. If we are willing to use what upsets us as a mirror to look deeper and to take more responsibility for our impact, we open the door to expanded awareness, growth, and empowerment.

We need to recognize and own our piece of a situation—no more, no less. Denying any of our impact, no matter how large or small, positive or negative, is disempowering to ourselves. Our willingness to observe, confront, and own our part is where the opportunities for growth, maturity and personal empowerment lie.

We should every night call ourselves to an account. Our vices will abate of themselves if they are brought every day to the shaft. —Seneca

The Gulp Stage

If we are upset and are, in effect, judging negatively what that person did or did not do, we need to ask how have we done some form of “that” ourselves. There is something of a similar nature, or mirror image, that we have not recognized or owned before. When we are misemotional about someone else’s behavior, inevitably we are hiding something from ourselves. For example, if we find ourselves feeling upset with and blaming someone because he or she did not follow through as promised, it is an opportunity to look closer at how we have not been fully responsible for our own promised or implied follow-through. This is often the “gulp stage,” for it is here that we finally recognize how irresponsible we have been.

It may very well be true that another person was irresponsible and didn’t deliver as promised—and that may need to be dealt with—but the opportunity and the empowering aspect is our increased willingness to recognize and take more ownership of the impact of our own behavior.

When we shift our attention from how the other person is upsetting us (placing responsibility “out there”) to how we are doing something similar and have been denying it (placing responsibility “in here”), three things immediately occur:

- We are less upset (our attention has shifted from blame to being more responsible);
- We have more positive control—we shifted our focus and intention from where we had little control (the other person) to where we have greater control (ourselves);
- We feel lighter and more empowered (the inevitable result of taking increased responsibility for our own behavior).

Going deeper is an opportunity not only to observe an aspect of our impact for which we have not been taking responsibility, but also to recognize the pattern of how we have been avoiding responsibility. Only when we are able to recognize and own our pattern are we able to drop the victim attitude. Only then are we able to be more personally responsible, expand our options and choices and empower ourselves to manifest constructive change.

When you see a man of the highest caliber, give thought to obtaining his stature. When you see one who is not, go home and conduct a self-examination.
—Confucius

The elegance of this process is that it is not dependent on the “rightness” or “wrongness” of either party. It is dependent solely on our willingness to observe and take responsibility for our own part in creating or allowing the upsetting situation to occur.