

Taking Personal Responsibility

by Brian Tracy

Did you ever stop to think that everything you are or ever will be is completely up to you? Just imagine!

You are where you are because of who you are. Everything that exists in your life exists because of you, because of your behavior, words and actions.

Because you have freedom of choice and because you have chosen each and every circumstance of your life, you are completely responsible for all of your success and failure, your happiness and unhappiness, your present and future.

That thought is like a parachute jump: It's scary and exhilarating at the same time. It's one of the biggest and most important ideas that can ever occur to you, or anyone else.

The acceptance of personal responsibility is what separates the adult from the child. It's the great leap forward into maturity. Responsibility is the hallmark of the fully integrated, fully functioning human being.

Responsibility goes hand in hand with success, achievement, motivation, happiness and self-actualization. It's the absolute minimum requirement for the accomplishment of everything you could ever really want in life.

Accepting that you're completely responsible for yourself and realizing that no one is coming to the rescue is the beginning of peak performance. There's very little that you cannot do or have after you accept that "If it's to be, it's up to me!"

The opposite of accepting responsibility is making excuses and blaming people and things for what's going on in your life. And since everything we do is a matter of habit, if people get into the habit of making excuses, they get into the habit of evading responsibility at the same time.

If they set a goal or objective for themselves, they immediately create an excuse that they hold in reserve just in case the accomplishment of the goal is too difficult or requires more self-discipline and persistence than they had thought.

As soon as things start to go poorly, irresponsible people trot out their excuse and let themselves off the hook. But that won't get them anywhere in the long run.

A basic law of human life was first espoused by Socrates more than 400 years before Christ. It's called the Law of Causality. We call it the Law of Cause and Effect.

It states that for every effect in your life, there's a cause. If there's any effect that you desire, or desire more of, you can trace it back to the cause, and by duplicating the cause, you can have the effect.

For example, everyone wants to be healthy. If you set a high level of physical health and energy as your goal, or the desired effect, you can have it simply by finding out the cause, by finding out what other healthy and energetic people do with regard to diet, exercise and rest, and by doing the same thing.

If you do, you're likely to get the same result. This is no miracle. It sounds simple, but in many cases, it's one of the hardest things in the world to do.

Unhappiness is an effect as well. If you wish to be happy, the first thing to do is to decide for yourself the kind of life situation in which you would feel wonderful.

Think of the very best times of your life, and think of what you were doing, where you were doing it, and the people you were with at the time. Then write out, in complete detail, a description of your ideal lifestyle. Now you have defined the effect that you desire.

Next, look at your current life and ask yourself, "What are all the things in my life that are inconsistent with the lifestyle that would make me happy?"

In other words, look at the causes of the effects that you don't like. Then make a decision to begin alleviating or removing those causes, one by one, until what you have left is the kind of life you want to live.

Your thoughts are extremely powerful. They have the power to raise and lower your blood pressure, your pulse rate and your respiratory rate. They can affect your digestion. And if your thoughts are strong enough, they can even make you sick or healthy.

Your thoughts tend to trigger images in your mind, and the feelings in your body are consistent with them. If you think or read happy, healthy thoughts, you will have happy, healthy pictures and experience happy, healthy emotions.

As Deepak Chopra points out in his audiocassette program *Magical Mind, Magical Body*, every part of your mind is connected to every single part of your body in a complex web of messages and impulses that affect everything you feel, say and do.

Only you can think your thoughts, only you can decide what you'll dwell upon, what you'll read and listen to, who you'll associate with and the conversations you'll engage in; therefore, you are totally responsible for all the consequences of all those behaviors. It's unavoidable.

Perhaps the most important part of the subject of self-responsibility involves your happiness and your peace of mind. There seems to be a direct relationship between responsibility and happiness on the one hand, and irresponsibility and unhappiness on the other hand. Let me explain.

First of all, the key to happiness is having a sense of control over what's going on in your life. The more you feel that you're in control, the happier you'll be. Men and women who have risen to the top of their organizations tend to be far happier than people further down.

This is because they feel far more in control of their destinies, far more capable of making decisions and taking action. The more responsibility you take in your company, the more power, authority and respect you'll receive.

One of the smartest things you can do is to take responsibility for the most important concerns of your boss. The more you accept responsibility for getting results in the areas that your boss considers most important, the more valuable and indispensable you'll become in your organization.

People who want more money and more respect often think that they can get it simply by asking for it or by politicking.

The truth is that it will accrue to you rapidly as soon as you “step up to the plate” and undertake responsibility for results in your organization. The most respected people in any company are those who are the most capable of getting the most important jobs done on schedule.

The more responsibility you take, the more in control you are. And the freer you are, especially in your own mind, to make decisions and to do the things you want to do.

So there's a direct relationship between responsibility, control, freedom and happiness. The happiest people in the world are those who feel absolutely terrific about themselves, and this is the natural outgrowth of accepting total responsibility for every part of their lives.

At the other end of the spectrum, there is irresponsibility, or the failure to accept responsibility. Each person is somewhere in between, moving toward a higher level of responsibility or irresponsibility with every word and every decision.

In fact, a good definition of insanity is total irresponsibility, to the point of needing a straitjacket and a padded cell. Thomas Szasz, the great psychoanalyst, once wrote, “There is no such thing as insanity. There are only varying levels of irresponsibility.”

A person who is completely irresponsible is subject to anger, hostility, fear, resentment, doubt-all sorts of negative emotions. And here's why. All negative emotions tend to be associated with blame.

Fully 99 percent of all our problems exist only because we're able to blame someone or something for them. The instant we stop blaming, our negative emotions begin disappearing.

What's the antidote to blaming? It's simple! Since your mind can hold only one thought at a time, either positive or negative, you can override the tendency to blame and become angry simply by saying, firmly, “I am responsible!”

You can't accept responsibility for a situation and be angry at the same time. You can't accept responsibility and be unhappy or upset. The acceptance of responsibility negates negative emotions and short-circuits any tendencies toward unhappiness.

The very act of accepting responsibility calms your mind and clarifies your vision. It soothes your emotions and enables you to think more positively and constructively. In fact, the acceptance of responsibility often gives you insight into what you should do to resolve the situation.

Here's an exercise: Look at the most common problems and difficulties that people have in life. Apply this simple remedy of accepting responsibility to each one, and see what happens.

People have problems with other people-their spouses, their children, their friends, their coworkers and their bosses. Someone once said that almost all of our problems in life have hair on top, come on two legs and talk back.

So think of the people in your life who cause you any stress or anxiety and ask yourself who is responsible. Are they responsible for being in your life, or are you responsible for having them in your life?

According to the Law of Attraction, you're a living magnet in that you invariably attract people into your life who harmonize with your dominant thoughts and emotions. The people in your life are there because you've attracted them by the person you are, by the thoughts you hold, by the emotions you experience.

If you're not happy with the people surrounding you, you're responsible. You're attracting them, and you're keeping them there.

Let me give you an example. I have four beautiful children. For a long time, when my children were behaving in ways that I felt were inappropriate, I had a tendency to blame or criticize them.

However, the more I studied child raising and learned about the subject, the more I found that children are almost totally reactive. Their behaviors are almost always responses to what is going on around them and to their relationships with their parents.

So I began asking the question, "What is it in me that is causing my child to act this way?" As soon as I turned the question around, and looked to myself for the reason-in effect, accepted complete responsibility for my children's behavior-I was able to see what I might be doing, or not doing, that my children were reacting to.

Perhaps I wasn't spending enough one-on-one time with them. Perhaps I wasn't listening to them when they wanted to talk. Perhaps I was too quick to question their report cards.

I began to apply that simple principle to every other part of my life as well. I began asking, "What is it in me that is causing this external situation?"

If the Law of Correspondence is true (and it is), and everything that is happening to you on the outside is due to something that is happening to you on the inside, then the first place to look is within.

As soon as you do that, you begin to see things that you had completely missed when you were busy blaming others and making excuses. You begin to see that you're responsible in large measure for the things that are happening to you.

If you're in a bad relationship, who got you there? You likely weren't marched into the relationship and kept there at gunpoint. So it's largely a matter of free will and free choice on your part. If you're not happy, it's up to you to do something about it.

As Henry Ford II once said, "Never complain, never explain." If you're not happy with the situation, do something about it. If you're not willing to do something about it, then don't complain.

There's the story of the construction worker who opens up his lunch box at the noon break and unwraps his sandwich to find that it contains sardines. He gets really upset and complains loudly to everyone around him about how much he hates sardines.

The next day, the same thing happens: a sardine sandwich. Again, the construction worker shouts and complains about how much he hates sardines for lunch.

The third day it happens again. By this time, his fellow workers are getting fed up with his loud complaining. One of them leans over and says to him, "If you hate sardines so much, why don't you tell your wife to make you some other kind of sandwich?"

The construction worker turns to the fellow and says, "Oh, I'm not married. I make my own lunches!"

Many of us get into the same situation as the construction worker's and complain about circumstances that are almost entirely of our own making.

Is this true for you? Look over your relationships and ask where this might be true in your life.

Are you happy with your job? Are you happy with the amount of money you're earning? Are you happy with your level of responsibility and your activities each day?

If you're not, you need to accept that you're completely responsible for every aspect of your job and your career. Why? Because you chose it freely.

You took the job, you assumed the responsibilities, and you accepted the wage. If you're not happy with any of them, for any reason, then it's up to you to do something different.

You're earning today exactly what you're worth-not a penny more, not a penny less. In life, we tend to get exactly what we deserve.

If you're not satisfied with the amount you're getting, look around you, at people who are doing the kind of work you would like to do and earning the kind of money you would like to earn. Ask them what they're doing differently from what you're doing.

What are the causes of the effects they're getting? Once you know what they are, accept complete responsibility for your situation, apply your wonderful mind and abilities, back them with willpower and self-discipline, and get busy making the changes you need to make to enjoy the life you want to enjoy.

Your great aim in life is to develop character. Character is composed of self-esteem, self-discipline, the ability to delay gratification, and the willingness to accept full responsibility for your life and everything in it.

The more you say to yourself, "I am responsible," the stronger, better and finer a person you become. And every part of your life will improve at the same time.

[Brian Tracy](#) is one of the world's leading authorities on personal and business success.