

# Keeping In Touch

June 2008

The Village Employee Assistance Program

## How to Take Responsibility & Stop Blaming Others *(even if others are to blame)*

Teaching children how to take personal responsibility for themselves and their actions is a key part of most elementary and middle school curriculums. We teach our kids the importance of making the right choices when it comes to drugs and alcohol, tending to their studies and behaving in class. We teach them to take responsibility for their choices, and to make them carefully in their life ahead.

As adults, it seems many of us forget the lessons we learned as children—that we make choices and our choices have consequences, which, more often than not, we are responsible for.

Most experts agree, taking personal responsibility for yourself is not only the adult thing to do, it's the right thing to do and one of the only ways you can remain the happy, healthy person you want to be.

### What Happens if You Don't Take Personal Responsibility?

You know you are not accepting personal responsibility if you do the opposite: blame others for your problems, life situation, hardships, character flaws, and just about everything and anything else. Rather than accepting the "blame" or responsibility for how your life is, you make excuses. Everything and anybody is to blame—except yourself.

Sound familiar? You may be blaming others more than you think. Have you ever:

- Blamed traffic/truck drivers/slow drivers for being late to an appointment?
- Blamed your hectic schedule for the reason you've put on a couple of pounds?
- Blamed your spouse for your bad day?

People who take responsibility, on the other hand, would have handled these situations as follows:

- Admitted that they should have left a few minutes earlier for their appointment.
- Acknowledged that, while being stressed because of a busy time, they've been skipping the gym and eating junk food more often.
- Accepted that no one is to blame for their bad day, other than themselves.

When you constantly blame others, view yourself as a victim and feel others are causing all of your hardships, you inevitably surround yourself with anger, resentment and negative thoughts—all of which are sure-fire ways to bring on fatigue, sadness, stress and even chronic disease.

### Blaming Others Brings on Chronic Stress

Harboring negative emotions and anger means you are living with chronic stress, the type that eats away at you, little by little. Chronic stress is the type of stress that has been linked to fatigue, back pain, stomach upset and headaches, along with numerous more serious illnesses, including:

- Heart disease
- Cancer
- Depression
- Autoimmune diseases
- Reproductive problems

**Stop Blaming**  
*continued on back*

### Counselor Column



**Darrin Tonsfeldt**

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**Q:** *Does positive thinking really make a difference in my health?*

**A:** We all know someone who, due in large part to a positive attitude, survived a difficult life situation or physical illness. The flip side is most of us also know people with wonderfully positive attitudes who succumbed to illness and poor health. The research on emotional intelligence, chronic stress, trauma, and depression, to name a few, is increasingly finding that how we perceive a situation impacts how our brain instructs the rest of the body to respond to that situation. Negative or fearful beliefs tend to activate the areas of our brain that get us ready to fight, run away, or hide. Positive beliefs tend to activate those areas of the brain and body that are responsible for rest and relaxation.

In terms of health, the stronger our negative attitudes, the more likely we will see situations in our life as threatening. This kicks in our psychobiologic

**Counselor Column**  
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"Keeping in Touch" is a monthly publication provided to employees covered by The Village Employee Assistance Program (EAP) through their employer's benefit package. If you have questions about your EAP benefit, or if you would like to access services, call

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## Signs You are Avoiding Personal Responsibility

It is often easy to spot someone else who blames others (*they may be the one constantly complaining about how bad their life is, yelling at others, or harboring an overly negative outlook on life*), but it can be more difficult to spot it in yourself. If you do any of the following as a matter of course, you may be avoiding personal responsibility.

- You almost never believe you are wrong. If you asked others to be completely honest, they'd say you believe you are never wrong.
- You dwell a lot on the past instead of looking toward the future.
- You use other people's irresponsible behavior to justify your own ("*They're driving way over the speed limit, so why shouldn't I?*").
- You believe apologizing is a sign of weakness (*instead of what it really is...a sign of strength*).
- You feel you have been dealt a "bad hand" in life.
- You view negative occurrences/relationships in your life as being out of your control.
- You don't think you can change anything in your life for the better.
- You believe life is unfair and often feel sorry for yourself.

## How to Take Responsibility, Stop Blaming Others and Start Living Your Life

Everyone blames someone else at one time or another. Nobody's perfect. And you may even be thinking, "But it WAS my spouse's/parent's/boss' fault that I missed my plane/don't trust others/don't make enough money."

And it very well may be, but the key to living a long and happy life is knowing how to accept personal responsibility and not blame others—even when it may be their fault. **This does not mean you have to go through life letting others walk all over you.** On the contrary, accepting personal responsibility means you have to take the high road and be the bigger person, even when it's hard. Here's how:

- Apologize when you're wrong (*this means first accepting that you're not always right*).
- Admit when you've made a mistake.
- Learn to forgive.
- Be open to the ideas and opinions of others.
- Identify the things in your life that you are not happy about, and do something to change them.
- Practice saying, "I am responsible." Eventually, you will start to believe it.
- Take smart risks, and realize that you are responsible for the outcomes.
- Adopt a positive outlook on life (*assume that things will go your way*).
- Recognize and embrace your own shortcomings, and ask others for help when you need it.

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responses to threats that place a high physical demand on our bodies and, if chronic, can start or aggravate physical and mental health problems.

Weight problems, diabetes, heart disease, muscle tension, ulcers, etc., can often be traced back to chronic stress due to negative beliefs about relationships, finances, work, self, etc. The American Psychological Association reported that approximately 75–90 percent of all physician office visits are for stress-related ailments and complaints.

While a positive attitude or perspective won't guarantee an illness-free life, it can go a long way toward reducing the level of distress we experience in dealing with life's circumstances, and reduce the negative physical demands on our bodies. Reducing those demands can reduce our chances of physical or emotional problems.

Research using a variety of scanning methods has shown that counseling that helps people process and reduce negative thoughts changes brain functioning in such a way that helps the body to heal. So the short answer to the question is yes, a positive attitude can help us to be healthier.

## Book Review

### QBQ! The Question Behind the Question

By John G. Miller

This is a quick but deep book that explores the role of personal accountability in one's work and personal life. In his own work experience, Miller found that many people look for others to blame their problems and conflicts on. He proposes that instead of asking who is to blame for the situation, we should ask, "What can I do to improve the situation?" Only by being able to ask this "question

behind the question" can we take ownership of the problem and start working toward a solution.

Throughout the book, Miller (*who has consulted for major corporations with his firm, QBQ, Inc.*) recounts real-world situations in customer service, retail sales, personal relationships and the corporate boardroom; and the positive and not-so-positive ways they were handled. Each example reinforces the message that personal accountability and ownership of a

problem not only leads to a resolution, but also lifts people willing to take ownership and action above those looking to play the "blame game."

From responsibility, says the author, comes leadership and greater career opportunities. In one's personal life, Miller says, ownership of conflict can also lead to enhanced relationships and greater enjoyment of daily life.

—*Publisher's Weekly*