

Bryan

It is said that the most difficult thing to do is to forgive someone. As difficult as forgiving someone can be, it is even more difficult to forgive yourself.

Imagine growing up in a family of fourteen in a rural Michigan town. And imagine living in a home adjacent to the family business where everyone was expected to work. *Everyone* meant from pre-kindergarten age to adult. There was a garden to tend, hay to bail, chickens and cows to feed, grass to mow, fences to mend, and buildings to paint.

In addition to the family farm, imagine living on a private airport that was home base for a hundred small aircraft. There were planes to wash, hangars to clean, gas to pump, runways to mow, and snow to plow. There was never a shortage of projects to do. The family motto was “Idle hands are the devil’s workshop.” Everyone in the family was expected to contribute.

What seems so ordinary was not so ordinary after all.



It was a warm, sunny September morning. My day began at 7:20, as it always did, with the family breakfast where we each were given our chores for the day. My project was to mow around our house plus 100 acres of airport grass. This was no riding mower, but rather a 7-gang reel lawn mower pulled by an open-air army surplus Jeep™. Yes, the Jeep was just like the ones you see in the World War II TV shows. I was 10 years old.

Dad and some other workers from the airport were going to cut down half-a-dozen Dutch elm trees in our backyard that day. They were dying due to an outbreak of Dutch elm disease. As each tree came crashing down, broken branches were spread across the yard. Dad used a tractor to pull the trunks and large branches away to the burn pile, leaving thousands of broken branches on the ground. He gave me the job of picking them all up. I used the Jeep and trailer to haul them to the dump, a half mile away on the other side of the airport.

In the process of doing my chore, my younger siblings wanted to ride on the trailer as I took loads of branches to the dump. On one of the trips, my younger brothers Rand, age 8, Grant, age 5, and

It was my fault.

Bryan, age 2, rode in the Jeep instead of on the trailer with my sisters. Bryan, who wanted to be on the trailer, crawled over the tailgate of the Jeep and fell under the attached trailer. Bryan was killed.

No matter how many times I was told that it was not my fault, deep down, I knew I was responsible for Bryan's death.

It was not my dad's fault who assigned me the job.

It wasn't my mom's fault, who was not even aware that everyone was riding to the dump.

It wasn't my sibling's fault.



It wasn't Bryan's fault for not listening and crawling over the Jeep tailgate.

It ... was ... my ... fault.

I agreed to let him go with me. I failed to take the precautions necessary for his safety. No one could convince me otherwise. I never bought into the consolation that “You were only 10 years old; it was not your fault.” It would have been dishonest for me to agree that it wasn't my fault, when deep down inside I knew the truth. Oh, I knew ... it was my fault!

A few hours after Bryan's death, I was sent to my aunt's house to stay with her until the funeral was over. I remember how scared I was about going back home and facing the wrath of my parents for what I had done. Three days later, I was home in time for dinner. The dinner table was eerily quiet. I felt extremely uncomfortable. No one was talking. Not about what the day had been. What tomorrow might bring. And, not about what happened.

That day I realized that no one wanted to mention anything about Bryan, because they thought it would make me feel bad. Bryan's two years' of existence had become invisible. As a family, Bryan's name and memories of him never passed our lips again. All the pictures of Bryan were put away. All his toys had been removed. Anything that would remind us of Bryan was removed ... all because of me. *I believed that Bryan would be here if it wasn't for me. A feeling I felt day after day in his absence.*



Understanding a Blaming Mindset

Blaming can be so deeply rooted into a mindset that consciousness is lost, and the behavior grows and consumes and destroys relationships.

Core beliefs are at the origin of one's blaming mindset. Whether you are aware or unaware of your blaming, core beliefs foster your blaming response. Frankly, until your core beliefs change, you will continue to have a blaming mindset that causes you to blame in thought, word, and deed.

Habitual blaming is the reflection of a person's personal history.

If it isn't broken, don't fix it. Blaming continues because it appears to work, at least in the moment.

Role modeling is how learning occurs. Witnessing blaming from parents, bosses, coworkers, neighbors, schoolmates, and political figures becomes such a strong force that mimicking behavior becomes unconscious.



Parents believe children that use blame because it can be easier than finding the truth, or easier to believe than confront.

Blaming is not necessarily personal. Blaming situations and circumstances is fair game, as well. Such as:

It's the economy.

It's the nature of my business.

It's the way I was raised.

A blaming nature can reflect what you have been taught as the tenets of your religious teachings.

Blaming can be so deeply rooted into a mindset that consciousness is lost, and the behavior grows and consumes and destroys relationships.

Gossiping cannot be ignored under the subject of blaming.

What is gossiping? Blamers are gossipers. Why is gossiping so important and common in relationships? What is hoped to be achieved? Attention, superiority, self-importance, deflection,

Gossipers are looking for someone or something to blame as soon as something doesn't go right.

collaboration, all come to mind.

How does it feel to be gossiped about? Do you feel betrayed, unappreciated, unloved, embarrassed, belittled, shamed, or bullied?

So, what has this to do with blaming? At the root, gossip is the need to assign blame, creating those feelings hoped to be achieved, such as deflecting attention away from a gossipers' own



insecurities. Gossipers are looking for someone or something to blame as soon as something doesn't go right. It is amazing how fast we come up with someone or something to blame. It's like an automatic response.

Gossiping is very disguisable and when masterfully executed can come off as concern, pity, or helpfulness. But stripped down to the core, it is a need to share events and assign blame with the person nowhere near to defend or rebuke. The gossip becomes the version the gossiper chooses to use, sometimes exaggerated to make it more interesting, laced with opinions and often limited in fact. You begin to realize how much we blame when we gossip. Blamers exaggerate and even lie about someone to deflect attention away from themselves, and then try to get others to join into their telltale story.

How much do you gossip? Most of us would say that we don't gossip. We are in denial! Why? Because calling yourself a gossip is saying you lay blame with the intent to hurt someone close to you that likely shared a personal event for your ears only. However, if you share wonderful news with the permission of others with the intent to promote, you are not a gossip. You are a friend.

To determine if you are a gossiper, ask yourself, "When I am finished talking about someone, did what I have to say about the person make him or her look better or worse?" If it is worse, you may be a gossiper.

Gossiping is not an endearing quality. It is a derisive tool in the relationship toolboxes that we unwittingly use. Those that gossip are perceived as friends who come off as petty, small, and immature. Gossiping, as a form of blaming, destroys relationships because gossip is never contained. Relationships are damaged whether the truth is stretched or not.



Relationships are wounded by distrust—because of the secret nature of gossiping—creating no winner. Ultimately, relationships are lost, reputations harmed, with the gossipers, blamer, not gaining the foothold that was hoped to be achieved. When you gossip you aren't being truthful, and you aren't being fair to those who are not there to defend themselves. Gossiping blamers are never a joy to be around.

My dad and I were visiting at a family gathering. In the adjacent room, my sisters were gossiping about a family member not in attendance. I could see my dad was not appreciating the gossiping conversation. He approached his daughters and said, “I hear that you’re talking about Sally. I have one thing to add to your conversation. In all the years I have known Sally, she has never said a bad thing about anybody.” And then he walked out of the room.

The BIG Question Do you call out the gossipers in your life? If not, why not?

Soul searching for the blamer:

- Why do I gossip about others? What good purpose does it serve?
- Who am I blaming? Who have I been blaming for years? And what is it costing me?
- Who have I rallied to my side to support my hate and vitriol toward another person?



- Have I been hooked into the hatred scheme by a vengeful blamer, and why have I gone along with it as a willing accomplice?
- What am I blaming?
- Am I blaming myself?

A propensity to blame is deeply rooted in your subconscious mind. It is omnipresent in your internal dialogue. It permeates everything you think, say, and do. Blaming is a mental blind spot, until you become aware. When you are aware and choose to change your habitual tendency to blame, you will need to have a change in your mindset.

Changing a blaming mindset requires erasing old beliefs that begins by asking questions, including:

- How is my blaming nature serving me?
- What is it costing me to blame?
- Am I really being truthful when I blame?
- Do I have any personal responsibility for what happened?

Erasing old beliefs makes room for new beliefs resembling these:

Belief 1: I have a choice in how I respond to everything that happens to me.

I can choose blame or choose to take personal responsibility. Even when it appears to be someone else's fault, and even when someone else takes the blame, I believe that in every situation, I have responsibility.

The BIG Question How can you be responsible when it is clearly not your fault?



Dawn decided to go to her friend's house one night to meet up with a group of friends. After the get together, she was driving home shortly after midnight. She pulled up to a red light at an intersection. After the light turned green, she looked both ways and began to proceed through the intersection. Out of nowhere, a car came racing through the intersection and slams into the side of Dawn's car. She is severely injured; in fact, permanently paralyzed from the waist down.

Who is responsible for Dawn's injuries? It is clearly not her fault. The driver of the car that ran the red light is to blame. Or it could be the manufacturer of her car. Maybe there was a malfunction. Maybe the traffic light was not working. Maybe it was the weather.

The courts will decide whose fault it is. Nonetheless, Dawn has personal responsibility for her paralysis. Even if the driver was drunk, didn't have his headlights on, and was texting, Dawn was personally responsible for her injuries on that night and personally responsible for how she responds to the accident.

As the driver, you are willing to put yourself at risk every time you go out to drive on the street with hundreds of other people. You decided consciously or subconsciously that you trust the manufacturer of your car. That it is safe and will not malfunction. You are prepared to avoid, if necessary, a deer, dog, or child that may run out in front of your car. You decided to trust that the other drivers on the road will be mindful and safe. You trusted that the traffic signals will all be operating properly on your route. In addition, you decided to drive home after midnight, knowing



that a higher percentage of impaired drivers are on the road after midnight. You willingly put yourself in harm's way. You had personal responsibility in your paralysis. Even when the court rules and sentences the man driving the car that broadsided you to ten years in prison, you had personal responsibility in what happened to you and how you respond to the situation.

What role did I have in the situation?

The same applies when you board a westbound plane for San Francisco and after takeoff the plane starts flying erratically and eventually plummets to the ground, killing everyone on board. Who is responsible for your death? ... the pilot? ... the airplane manufacturer? ... the airlines? ... the air traffic control? ... the weather? ... the plane's maintenance crew?

The answer is you have responsibility for your own death. "Me! How could it be me?" you ask. As the passenger, you have responsibility for your death. Every time you board an airplane, you have one chance in ten million of dying on the flight. Every time you board a plane, you know the odds and you decide to take your chances. You have personal responsibility for that decision and the subsequent consequence if one occurs.

Blaming holds me in bondage while taking personal responsibility is liberating. When I catch myself in a blame mindset, I immediately say "STOP!"; and consider, "What role did I have in the situation?"

Belief 2: I believe that everyone is doing the best they can with the prevailing awareness they have at the time.

We are all prone to making mistakes and except in cases of pure evil, most people are doing the best they can with the prevailing awareness they have at the time. No one really



attempts to fail at something. It is true that we all know people, including ourselves, who can be apathetic, lazy, procrastinate, and forgetful. Are apathetic people doing “the best they can”? No, we don’t all do the best that we can. Many fall short of the mark. However, believing that people are doing the best that they can with the prevailing awareness they have at the time, in that moment, is generally a true statement.

When I observe people’s behavior that is less than optimal, instead of mocking it, criticizing it, gossiping about it, and calling them stupid, I consider that they are doing the best that they can with their prevailing awareness. My observation turns into understanding, tolerance, concern, and wonder. I wonder what could have happened in each of their lives that would cause them to respond in that way. I wonder if they became more aware of what is at the root of their folly, would they respond in a more beneficial way. Maybe!

What if they knew what their apathy was costing them?

What if they had a mentor or model in their life that would inspire them?

What if they had experiences that were more esteem-building than merely watching their parents do it all for them?

What if they had faith and hope in a cause greater than self?

Would a little pain and suffering convert their apathetic outlook someday?

Would it take a “crash and burn scenario” in their life to change their awareness?



When I believe that everyone is doing the best they can, it causes me to be in a more affirming relationship. It causes me to see life as a series of opportunities instead of a series of problems. When others make a mistake or fail, it is an opportunity to learn. I am willing to accept the consequence of giving someone another chance. I appreciate when someone gives me a second chance and I will act in kind.

Where I used to feel disappointed and think negatively when someone let me down. I now realize it was my poor judgment when I decided to depend on that person and trust him or her. I will be more careful about whom I trust in the future.

Belief 3: When I say, “It’s not my fault,” I am not being totally honest and truthful.

Can you think of a time when you felt bad or sad about something you did and your friend or parent said to you, “It wasn’t your fault,” and you felt unsatisfied with the remark?

You tried to accept what the person was saying, but deep down you knew your mischief and that you were responsible.

I am being untruthful when I blame someone or something else, because I have a personal responsibility in everything that happens. Even if everyone else says it wasn’t my fault, I still have some responsibility in what happened and in how I respond to the situation.

When Paul lost his hands, he had everyone telling him that it wasn’t his fault. The shop owner was at fault. The foreman was at fault. His coworker was to blame. Everyone was “shoulding” on his boss and manager. Yet Paul knew that he was not being honest



and truthful to blame someone else. He knew that he could have prevented the accident, and he didn't. And, he could have had a safer job for less money, and he chose to work there anyway. At 20, Paul was doing the best he could with the prevailing awareness he had at the time.

Non-blamers believe that actions rooted in honesty and truth will produce the best outcome even when they can't see how. They are willing to accept their mistakes and fess up to them.

Additionally, they believe that they earn the respect and the trust of others when they truly take personal responsibility for what happens instead of blaming. They make personal intention statements like these:

- ✓ *I will ask questions instead of presuming I already know what others are thinking and feeling. I will put myself in their shoes and see situations from their perspective.*
- ✓ *I will practice premeditated forgiveness. I know in advance that others will falter, and their missteps and misdeeds will affect me as my mischief will affect them.*
- ✓ *I will be patient with others, as they uncover their blind spots and self-discover a new awareness.*
- ✓ *I will avoid "shoulding" on others. Giving unsolicited advice is blaming in disguise.*

Belief 4: When I blame it does more harm to my mindset than it does to the person who I am blaming.

- Blame poisons my mind and is released throughout my body as I think about the situation or the person I blame.
- Blame prevents me from being happy. It causes me to have a negative demeanor, as I harbor negative thoughts.



- Blame makes it difficult for me to be respectful and caring, as I project my anger openly and silently.

I have observed my friend vehemently express her hatred for her ex-husband, when she says, “He’s toxic.” I can’t help but think of all the cortisol being excreted throughout her body that could cause so much damage to her physical being.

I will not allow myself to have that much hate and vitriol toward another, no matter what that person has done. I will say, “Yes, that person hurt me. However, I will not let them continue to hurt me, day after day, for the rest of my life by constantly spewing my venom inside and out.”

When someone else takes responsibility by saying “it’s on me” or “it was my fault” or “I am responsible” ... that’s fine. Nevertheless, it doesn’t absolve me of my personal responsibility and how I respond to the situation. When blame starts to fall off my lips, I now see a big red STOP sign. The visual of the red STOP sign reminds me of “the elephant in the room” and the danger to me when I proceed with blame. You each have a choice to carry around in your mindset the RED amphora of blame or BLUE amphora of personal responsibility.

When I carry the BLUE amphora of personal responsibility, I have thoughts resembling these:

- ✓ *I will cut others a little slack. I will reject being a coconspirator of a blaming nature.*
- ✓ *I will eliminate any codependent relationship that keeps supporting my blaming ways and the blaming ways of others.*
- ✓ *I will surround myself with people who take personal responsibility and expect me to do the same.*



- ✓ *I will stop explaining, defending, and justifying my actions. When I am justifying my actions, I am assigning blame.*
- ✓ *I will forgive those who have said hurtful and mean things to me.*
- ✓ *I will reject the blaming that is expected of my ethnicity and social background. I will resist the cultural normalization of blaming. I will seek wise counsel.*

Your blaming nature will never change unless your core beliefs change. When your beliefs change, your values will begin to change. When your beliefs and values change, you will begin to respond to the situations in your life in a new way.



Excuses

Excuses are a primary way you avoid having to take personal responsibility for what happens in your life.

What is your “I am, because” statement? How would you complete the following statement?

**“I am _____,
because _____.”**

Excuse-making is omnipresent. As it is with blame, making excuses is a debilitating cultural norm. Your brain has been conditioned to immediately go to an excuse to explain something that happened or didn't happen. Why you did or didn't do something. Why you said something or didn't say something. For virtually everything that happens, you habitually formulate an excuse.

Excuses happen so fast that you don't even have to consciously think of an excuse. The excuse subconsciously appears in your mind and it's immediately at the tip of your tongue. The great



thing about the excuses you use is that most of them are pre-approved. This is your “basket of excuses.” They are time-tested; they always work. They are preapproved by your parents, teachers, friends, coworkers, and even your entire society. Simply pull one from the basket and excuse away.

**Excuses get us
out of trouble.**

A typical Basket of Excuses includes:

- I wasn't feeling well.
- I had something else come up.
- I was too tired.
- I didn't get a good night's sleep.
- My alarm didn't go off.
- Traffic was terrible.
- I forgot.
- I tried.
- I'm so stupid!
- Well, I guess I'm not perfect after all.
- I was afraid.
- I have anxiety.
- We all make mistakes.
- I'm only human.
- I would have if
- I really wanted to, but



I was at the car wash recently and after my car was washed, I noticed that the attendant had failed to clean the dashboard. I asked him to wipe it down. He responded, “My bad!” His response has earned a place in the “basket of excuses.” I have heard that same line a few times since then. Interesting! “My bad!” It falls off the tongue with ease and is code for *we all make mistakes*, “Oh, well, deal with it.” And as the recipient of the response, I am expected to accept it.

Excuse-making is another way for us to avoid having to be responsible. What is it about personal responsibility? Why do we work so hard to avoid it? We blame. We make excuses. Why is it that we don't see situations as opportunities to learn; as opportunities to overcome challenges and confrontations? Instead, we try to pass it off on to someone else or make up an excuse for what happened.

Why? Because they work! Excuses get us out of trouble. They take the heat off. We can avoid having to be responsible to do the work. We can get away with things. It's the easy way out.

We are highly creative when it comes to making excuses. We even brag about it when our excuses work. The best thing about excuses is that we don't have to make them up ourselves. Our parents, teachers, coworkers, and friends make excuses for us all the time. We appreciate it when they make excuses for us, because we don't even have to use one. They do it for us. Here are a few:

- You did your best; that's all anyone can expect.
- We all make mistakes, no worries.
- It happens to the best of us.



- Better luck next time.
- I should have helped you with it.
- What do they expect—you're only human!
- You're new on the job.
- You're still in high school.
- You're under a lot of stress.
- I know you have a lot going on right now, so

We like it when others make an excuse for us, it lets us off the hook. We reciprocate by making excuses for our friends. Oh, it's wonderful having codependent friends, isn't it?

You learned at a young age that excuses didn't have to be true to work.

Excuse-making is inherent in our culture. We are quite good at it. Excuses cause people to expect

less from us. Excuses automatically appear in the prefaces we use when we speak. Before we say something, we preface the excuse with a short preamble:

- I would like to
- I hope to
- I'll try
- I should
- If only
- I don't know if
- I suck at
- I had to
- It would be nice if
- I might



- I can't
- I won't

Prefaces are the two, three, or four words we use to begin statements and thoughts. The prefaces we use will indicate if what the person is saying is an excuse, a commitment, an intention, an expectation, or being wishful. See a more complete explanation in the glossary.

The BIG Question Do you ever consider how prefaces effect your internal dialogue? What effect do prefaces have on what you are projecting in your conversations?

You learned at a young age that excuses didn't have to be true to work. You didn't have to prove your excuse. It was never questioned if the excuse came from the preapproved list of excuses. Excuse-making is so expected that it has become a cultural norm.

Your parents, teachers, spouses, and friends expect you to make excuses. They want you to make excuses because they want "the reason."

- Why didn't you get it done?
- What do you have to say for yourself?
- Why are you late?

Withholding the reason is like torture to your inquisitor. Responding with "I am just late" isn't good enough. You need a reason for why you were late.



The BIG Question Why do we need a reason for an excuse? Is an excuse without a reason an excuse?

Blaming and excuse-making are the two primary ways you avoid having to take personal responsibility for what happens in your life. And it is the complicity of your parents, teachers, friends, and the social discourse that make it seem the natural way to be.

Excuses come in many forms.

Using the word “but” is our most prevalent linguistic excuse. Every time you use the word “but,” you are in the process of creating an excuse. Everyone accepts the explanation if there is a “but” in the middle of the sentence. Or so it seems.

When your mindset comes from a place of making excuses, you tend to use the word “but.”

- I was going to do that, *but* I had to take the dog for a walk.
- I wanted to go to the store to get something for dinner, *but* I had to drop off something at the gym.
- I would have tried out for the team, *but* I knew I wouldn’t make it.
- I was going to go to the party Friday night, *but* I went to the movies instead.
- I know I need to organize the front desk, *but* I had too many other things get in the way.

When your mindset comes from a place of taking personal responsibility, you tend to say it in a different way:



- I was going to do that, *however*, I decided to take the dog out for a walk.
- I was planning to go to the store to get something for dinner, and then at the last minute, I decided to go to the gym and workout instead.

When you take personal responsibility, you tend to drop the excuse part of the “but” statement altogether:

- I decided to not try out for the team.
- I decided to go to the movies Friday night.
- I got many important things done and organizing my desk is still on the list.

The word “but” is the most common word we use to set up our excuse and we expect the conjunction “but” to be automatically accepted. It’s like we are all programmed to accept all excuses that use “but.” Is the habitual use of the word “but” another “elephant in the room?” Instead, have you ever considered replacing the word “but” with a word or phrase that indicates personal responsibility?

A recent read on the subject is the book *All Buts Stink* by Walter Bond.

Ifing

Another common word in the excuse-making lexicon is the word “if.” “Ifing” is when you use the preface “if” as you set up your excuse. It is like the “but” that is usually in the middle of your sentence. The “If” is generally at the beginning of stating your excuse.

- If I only knew that
- If she would have ... , I could have
- If Lucy told me, I
- If I never would have gotten married
- If my boss wouldn’t



We have culturally accepted “ifing” as a normal way of saying something, though the premise behind the statement is an excuse. “If” implies that you are not responsible for the “if” part of what you are saying. “Ifing” can be a permanent and persistent part of your thinking. What would need to exist for “ifing” to be eradicated from the self-talk in your mind?

EDJing

Explaining, defending, and justifying props up an excuse. Excuses are inherently weak, often untrue, and exaggerated. EDJing is an attempt to validate the excuse. Does being skillful at explaining, defending, and justifying make statements any truer?

Sorry!

The overuse of the single word “Sorry!” has created this apologetic vacuum, often meaningless and used as the excuse rather than a sincere and heartfelt concern for the other person. In this way, the use of the single word “Sorry!” is a *sorry* excuse! It is best exemplified when the one word “Sorry!” is stated solely and the belief is that is all that is needed. The offender has moved on, so the receiver must, too. The receiver is expected to immediately accept and understand. The level of narcissism is uncanny in that the offender is saying “I am good so you must be.”

As an example, to confirm this point, have you ever followed up a person using the “Sorry! card” by asking “What are you sorry for?” You likely will observe surprise that you would even ask that question, followed by “I said sorry, what else do you want me to say?” Again, the expectation is that the simple use of the word “Sorry!” is all that is required, since the consciousness of the offender is cleared.



When I was traveling with my children we would frequently stop at campgrounds and resorts. Invariably, something would go wrong where we were staying such as:

“The pool is closed today. Sorry!”

“There will be no campfires tonight. Sorry!”

“We are all out of fish today. Sorry!”

It got to the point in our travels that my children would perk up when they heard the word “sorry,” because they knew I was going to have a reaction of some kind. They would repeat the exaggerated version of the word by drawing it out in unison “S-o-r-r-y!” It became known as one of my many pet-peeves and one of their favorite dad idioms.

Saying “Sorry!” in these ways is an attempt to release the offender from responsibility, with no learning, forgiveness, remediation, correction, or solution. The receiver is eliminated from the equation and any consequences that are derived are expected to be accepted.

I feel this way, because

When you find people who are explaining why they are the way they are, it is, in fact, an excuse. Such as:

- I am _____, because I had a terrible childhood.
- I am _____, because I am gay (Asian, Jewish, Black, etc.)
- I am _____, because my parents died when I was 10 years old.

Why is the saying “Being True to Your Word” important?

What does this mean? It’s heard so often, it may have gotten lost in the essence of this phrase and its importance to live by as an



extremely valuable virtue. When actions are incongruent with words, trust and respect can be lost. Why? Words become meaningless and the phrase “Your word is your bond,” actually means “Do as you say at all times.” Period! Maintaining healthy, trusting, and satisfying relationships means simply being true to your words. Do you have friends that when they say something, you think to yourself, “Yeah, whatever?” Or “I’ll believe that when I see it.” How about when someone says something to you that is hurtful or not truthful, and then the person follows it with:

- Oh, I really didn’t mean that.
- I was just kidding.
- I was just playing with you.
- Don’t be so sensitive.

How does that make you feel? Do you wonder, “Did the person mean what he/she said?”

These are hurtful attempts to be funny or flippant, yet instead they are rude and judgmental, followed by a sarcastic disclaimer. Is this in truth being your word? Is this an enjoyable person to be around? Are you one of those people?

Do excuses remediate anxiety and fears? Or do excuses create more anxiety and fear?

One of the most acceptable excuses used today is to say that “I am stressed out.” Everyone can relate to being stressed out. Anxiety is a great excuse. The best part of using anxiety as an excuse is that it has been certified by psychologists and the medical community. When you say, “I am anxious” or “I have anxiety.” You have a perfectly acceptable excuse.



Teachers and colleges tolerate inferior performance, because being anxious is a cultural norm. Parents have bought into what is wrong with their kid is that he or she is stressed out.

Unfortunately, excuses have become the preferred antecedent for the anxious parent raising the stressed child, which does nothing to mitigate the child's anxiety and fear. It only perpetuates it. The same applies to school and work environments.

The BIG Question Is anxiety a choice? Is anxiety “the elephant in the room?”



Excuse-Maker

I will take personal responsibility
for my mistakes and failures.

Incorporate the five BLUE beliefs in your mindset.

BLUEs reveal what they believe in their internal dialogue. Beliefs that are similar to the following:

Belief 1: I have, in some way, personal responsibility in everything that happens to me.

I could give an excuse from my basket of excuses. Even when someone else makes an excuse for me, I know that I have some mischief in the situation. I am responsible for how I respond and react. I may not have initiated it and may not have caused it; nevertheless, I am responsible for how I respond.

When my son Blake was in 5th grade, he had a pattern of not doing his homework. His teacher tells the story of one of the times she asked Blake, “Why didn’t



you do your homework?" She was taken aback by his response. "I didn't want to." The teacher asked, "What do you mean you didn't want to?" Blake responded, "I just didn't want to do it."

It was as simple as that. No attempt to make an excuse. He made no attempt to explain, defend, or justify. Now, the teacher wasn't happy about Blake choosing not to do his homework. However, she was surprised by his response, and respected him for his honest and candid answer, remembering, "His honesty caught me off guard as I was expecting an excuse."

Belief 2: When I make excuses, I am inviting and supporting codependent relationships.

When people accept my excuses, they are enabling me. When I accept their excuses, I am enabling them. When I am searching for people who will accept my excuses, I am looking for codependent relationships. Codependent relationships keep me stuck. My having codependent friends is like falling into the pit of despair.

Portia Nelson eloquently presents this characteristic in her five-chapter poem *There Is a Hole in My Sidewalk*.

There Is a Hole in My Sidewalk

Chapter I

I walk down the street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.

I fall in.

I am lost ... I am helpless.



It isn't my fault.
It takes me forever to find a way out.

The BIG Question How many times are you falling in the same hole on your sidewalk?

Read the remaining four chapters of the poem in her book *There Is a Hole in My Sidewalk: The Romance of Self-Discovery*.

Belief 3: Excuses damage my self-esteem and the esteem of others.

When I take personal responsibility, I am elevating the level of respect I have for myself. I feel good about not making an excuse. When I resist the temptation to make an excuse, it becomes an “esteem-building experience” for me. When I take the consequences for my mistakes, instead of creating an excuse, I feel more accomplished and satisfied. I feel more resilient that I was able to break my excuse-making habit. It confirms to me the strength of my constitution. And I will take personal responsibility for my mistakes and failures.

One of my staff members, Christy, is responsible for getting the lab cases organized and sent out to the correct lab. On one occasion, a lab case was sent to the wrong lab, which was easily corrected with a phone call. However, it is Christy's responsibility to make sure the cases are sent out properly. I called Christy into my office and confronted her about the error. She listened to my need to tell her how important this duty is and



that it can't happen again. She looked me in the eye and said, "Dr. McKinley, I will take care of it. I will make sure it doesn't happen again." End of the discussion.

However, it wasn't the end of the story. Later that day, another staff member came to me and said, "Dr. McKinley, I want to apologize for sending that case to the wrong lab. Christy wasn't even here the day it was sent out."

When I asked Christy later about it, she said, "Yes, I wasn't here on that day, but the last thing you needed to hear from me was 'Dr. McKinley, I wasn't even here on that day.' I'm responsible for the lab cases going out, so I said I will take care of it."

Christy was committed to not making an excuse. She could have easily told me that she wasn't even working on the day the case was sent out. Christy took personal responsibility, even when someone else tried to get her off the hook with an excuse.

Belief 4: Excuses make me appear weak and incapable.

When I make excuses, I am not being authentic. I expose my fear of failure and I fail to learn the lessons of my folly. What I communicate is that "I can't be trusted."

I will reject the attempt of someone to make excuses for me.

You can continue to lament the mistakes and misfortunes of the past, or see them as opportunities to learn.

It demeans me when they do.

**Belief 5:** Anxiety is a choice.

When I have anxious feelings, it is often because of my own doing. When I don't plan, I am setting myself up for frustration and failure. When I procrastinate, it often leads to feelings of anxiety.

REDS say: “*Why do it today when I can do it tomorrow.*”

BLUES say: “*Why put it off until tomorrow, when I can do it today.*”

When I agree to do too much, or when I put off what needs to be done until later, all the things I need to do will build up to a point where it becomes insurmountable.

When I am striving to meet someone's expectations, I feel anxious. It is better for me to set my own expectations.

BLUES believe: “What others say about me is none of my business.” How can I get anxious about what others say about me when it is none of my business? BLUES believe that anxiety is a choice: I am personally responsible for how I respond in every situation.

You can continue to lament the mistakes and misfortunes of the past, or see them as opportunities to learn. You can wish that some things were different every morning when you wake up or you can see each day as an opportunity to solve and resolve.

Stop using your habitual RED lexicon and replace it with a BLUE lexicon.

Avoid using the word “but.”

Replace the word “but,” as it often connotes an excuse, with one of these words: “however,” “and,” “yet,” or “instead.” Try it a few times and see if it conveys a different sentiment in your conversations.



Avoid using the word “Sorry!” as a stand-alone response.

When you catch yourself saying “Sorry!,” recognize it as being void of personal responsibility. Instead add the preface “I am” as in “*I am* sorry for any inconvenience this caused you. Is there anything I can do to make it up to you?”

Preceding the statement “Sorry!” with “*I am* sorry!” is distinctively different. It projects empathy instead of a too-bad-for-you attitude.

Using the words “I regret” or “I apologize” will also work to connote personal responsibility, unlike the stand-alone use of the word “Sorry!,” which often nullifies personal responsibility.

I regret that the pool is under repair today. For any inconvenience that creates for you, we have arranged for you to use the pool at the health club across the street.

I apologize for being late. Let me buy lunch today for any inconvenience I have created for you.

Stop Ifing

Avoid using the word “if” and “if only.” Using the word “if” is the set-up for an excuse.

Avoid using prefaces that start an excuse.

Avoid saying:

- I tried.
- I hoped to
- I would have liked to
- I wanted to
- I should have
- I wish I



- I was afraid that

Instead, start your sentences with words of conviction and personal responsibility such as:

✓ *I am ...*

✓ *I will ...*

✓ *I get to ...*

Take notice what changes when making this simple word choice.

If you have a difficult time breaking this old habit, ask a trusted friend to call you out when he/she hears you use excuse-laden prefaces.

Incorporate true apologies in your conversations.

When you don't keep your agreement and it creates an inconvenience for someone, take personal responsibility for the situation and when needed, give a *true apology*. A true apology has four parts.

- 1. Take personal responsibility for the situation.** Don't blame, make excuses, or give a reason for your folly. Just say ...

Yes, I did it. I will make sure it doesn't happen again.

- 2. Express true regret for creating the situation that caused an inconvenience for someone else.** Avoid saying it like "Oh well! Too bad for you." Act as if you care. Be sure that you don't put it on the other person by saying, "Don't be so sensitive." Or "Get over it." Or "I am sorry you took it that way." Instead, say something like ...
I apologize for any inconvenience I caused you.



3. Acknowledge and appreciate their understanding, acceptance, and even forgiveness when it's appropriate. Respond by saying something like ...

Thank you for being so understanding.

4. Make it up to the person. Or, at the very least, offer to make it up in some way by simply stating ...

How can I make it up to you?

Make a personal commitment to use BLUE "precepts."

Precepts are personal intention statements that are designed to alter and create new beliefs, values, and principles with the intention to bring about a paradigm shift and replace the less desirable habitual responses of the past. My dictionary defines a precept as: *a general rule intended to regulate behavior or thought; a command or principle intended especially as a rule of action.*

How to make precepts become your reality.

Precepts are personal intention statements that you formulate in your mind to bring out an outcome that you value. The need to create a precept emerges out of an *awareness* and desire to have a different result in your life.

RED beliefs lead to RED values, which lead to RED precepts, which lead to RED principles, which lead to RED responses and behavior.

BLUE beliefs lead to BLUE values, which lead to BLUE precepts, which lead to BLUE principles, which lead to BLUE responses and behavior.

It is the beliefs, values, and principles (BVP) that have been built into your life that determines how you respond in every situation. When your habitual response is to blame and make excus-



es, you can bring about a change by taking on new beliefs and values. These beliefs and values will begin to create new precepts that replace old principles that will lead to more personal responsibility. Being personally responsible mitigates your propensity to blame and make excuses.

Start with owning precepts similar to these below by thinking to yourself ...

- ✓ *I take personal responsibility for everything that happens.*
- ✓ *I will look at what I could have done differently instead of creating an excuse.*
- ✓ *I avoid pointing the finger at someone else or something else.*
- ✓ *I plan for the contingencies that could affect my ability to keep my agreements.*
- ✓ *I only agree to do the things that I know I can commit to.*
- ✓ *I will show honor and respect to others by not insulting them with an excuse.*
- ✓ *I will select friends who do not make excuses for me or allow me to make excuses for them.*
- ✓ *I am my word. When I fail to keep my word, I will offer to make it up to the other person.*
- ✓ *I will affirm others who take personal responsibility instead of making excuses.*

Consider creating new precepts that will mitigate anxiety and fear, such as:

- ✓ *I will not put off until tomorrow what I can do today.*
- ✓ *I have a choice in how I respond in every situation.*



- ✓ *I will stay in the present moment and not worry about tomorrow.*
- ✓ *I will remind myself that “This, too, will pass.”*
- ✓ *I believe that everything happens for a reason. What is my opportunity here?*

The BIG Question What other precepts could you incorporate in your self-talk and conversation that would help to mitigate fear and anxiety?



The Unforgiving Mindset

The shackles of perpetual bondage from an unforgiving mindset can last a lifetime.

It is common for victims of rape and sexual attacks to blame themselves. They are clear that the person who attacked them is to blame. Nevertheless, they have doubting thoughts of self-blame that wander around in their minds.

They question themselves. They say things like these in their internal dialogue:

- What could I have done to prevent it?
- Did I put myself in an unprotected place?
- Did choosing to drink alcohol cause me to be more vulnerable?
- Did I in my jovial way inadvertently send the wrong message?
- Did I trust someone I shouldn't have?



They would have thoughts resembling these:

- I was too afraid to tell anybody about what happened.
- I can't tell anyone about what happened because I fear that person may retaliate.
- I was afraid of being ridiculed for not doing enough.

We all have regrets. We all have guilt feelings. We all have harmed others in significant ways. Remember Mary. She was afraid to tell her story about being raped by her stepfather, because she feared the reprisal of her brother and natural father. In her words: "My brother and dad would kill him if they knew what he did."

The pain and suffering around the tragedy of being raped was more than she could bear. She was unwilling to put her mother, stepsisters, nephews, nieces, brother, and father through *the ordeal from hell*.

Perpetual victims feel the guilt of their past indiscretions.

- I couldn't forgive myself for forcing my girlfriend to have an abortion.
- I couldn't forgive myself for cheating on my spouse.
- I couldn't forgive myself for the harm I did to my children when I got a divorce.

Perpetual victims can become protective and controlling.

- I became so protective of my children to the point of being harsh.
- I thought I was loving them and instead, I was stifling them.
- I was controlling and manipulative.



The BIG Question Have you been unable to forgive yourself? How much suffering is punishment enough? What is the price you have to pay? Do you plan to carry it to your grave?

In these significant events, it is common to blame yourself in some way. Through all the blaming of others, the more you scream about being violated and victimized, you push deeper these thoughts that wander around in your mind. You, in effect, bury them so deeply that you forget those self-blaming thoughts; yet they are still there, out of your conscious awareness.

Your friends and family help you bury them deeper by assuring you that you had no fault in the situation. You may hear: “It wasn’t your fault.” “He’s a pervert.” “You were too young to know better.” “You shouldn’t have been put in that situation.”

Deep down, you feel some blame in what happened. You think and wish you could have prevented it from happening in some way. In a weird way, you blame yourself for not doing enough. Blaming yourself is “the elephant in the room.”

The cost of an unforgiving mindset is the harm it does to your health. When you continuously hold on to resentment, hate, and vitriol toward your perpetrator, the stress hormone cortisol is released in your body. Cortisol is critical to activate the fight-or-flight response. Your heart rate rises, breathing is more rapid, oxygen-rich blood is diverted to the skeletal muscles, and your mental awareness and capacity is heightened. The excessive cortisol that is released when you overreact to and dwell on past unsettling events can eventually cause harm to your health.



The emotions related to the unwillingness to forgive may cause physical damage and increase the likelihood of physical ailments.

With new beliefs, your response will change.

It leads to tension in the musculoskeletal system, causing headaches, neck pain, and back pain. Excessive cortisol affects the heart and kidneys, as well as many other organs of the body. Your unforgiveness for yourself may shorten your life.

Unforgiveness results in anxiety and depression.

Nearly everyone is holding onto some anxiety from the past, some significant emotional event that has caused pain and suffering. Unresolved long-term anxiety can lead to depression and other emotional and mental issues. For whatever reason, we are unwilling and unable to consider the cost and cause of such an unforgiving mindset. The result is a blind spot that is difficult to expose. It may take years of processing, therapy, and a dependence on medications to find ways of coping with one's anxiety and depression.

Blaming and the unforgiving of yourself is paralyzing.

It is stifling to be shackled into emotional bondage. It poisons beliefs and affects how we respond in every situation. Consider how the beliefs that you come to have as a result of your personal history can keep you in bondage for a lifetime. For many of us, this is the “elephant in the room” and it will stay the “elephant in the room” until we begin to ask questions like:

- Why am I like this?
- Why do I have such hatred in my heart?
- Why do I feel unlovable?
- Why do I always blame something else or someone else for my debilitating feelings and emotions?
- Why can't I say “I love you” to my dad on his deathbed?



The “why” will be revealed when you realize that throughout your life you have built the beliefs that determine how you respond to every situation. What you feel, what you habitually do, what you think about, and what you say, all stem from what you believe. AND it will stay that way the rest of your life unless you consider new beliefs. With new beliefs, your response will change.

The unforgiving person finds him/herself carrying around a RED amphora that ...

- Contains *feelings* such as ...
hurt, anger, sadness, bitterness, hate, vitriol, contempt, apathy, depression, fear, anxiety, self-hatred, and worthlessness.
- Contains *memories* of being ...
lied to, rejected, punished, belittled, tortured, ridiculed, laughed at, cheated, damaged emotionally, and made out to be the bad guy.
- Contains *beliefs* resembling ...
I am unlovable, I am unworthy, and I am to blame.
- Contains *decisions* and *choices* such as ...
I need to guard and protect myself from it happening again.
I need to fight my nemesis to the end.
I need to be careful about letting people know that I love them.
I am determined to overcome all I have been through.
I am afraid that what happened to my mom/dad/sibling could happen to me.
I cannot trust men. I cannot trust women. I cannot trust
_____.



Carrying around a RED amphora of unforgiveness negatively affects ...

- Your confidence and courage.
- Your hope, trust, and faith.
- Your joy and spiritual well-being.

The contents in the RED amphora of unforgiveness isn't solely the providence of the victim. As a parent, sibling, and friend, you will rally to the defense of your loved ones who have been

Carrying around the amphora of unforgiveness causes me to wonder if I can trust myself.

harmed. The hate and vitriol expressed by the parent of the married child who has been scorned by his/her spouse can

be as intense as the victimized. It is almost as if you willfully carry the same RED amphora of unforgiveness that the victim carries.

The effects of being jilted and jaded by a previous marriage and a horrific divorce can carry itself into a new relationship and marriage. The shadows of unforgiveness from the previous marriage can lurk in the background. The hurt and pain keeps showing up in the new relationship as occasional spurts of bitterness, revenge, verbal tirades, and nonverbal looks of contempt for your ex. These will surface and glimpses of the angst are picked up by your new spouse.

The reason is that you are still carrying the RED amphora of unforgiveness into your new relationship.

Unlike the RED amphora of unforgiveness, the BLUE amphora of forgiveness is revealed in one's internal dialogue. It contains beliefs and precepts like these:

Belief 1: I was doing the best I could with the prevailing awareness I had at the time.



Many of us hold onto bitterness and anger toward our parents. Parents did things that were seemingly heartless and cruel. Sometimes they made decisions that, in hindsight, were hurtful and demeaning. Sometimes our parents said something that hurt us deeply and they never took it back or apologized for saying it.

You may have been hurt by your parents, siblings, spouse, friends, coaches, and teachers. You can dwell on it and be angry and resentful. All of which is much more harmful to you. Instead, when you believe that they were doing the best they could with the prevailing awareness they had at the time, the animosity begins to go away.

For 30 years after my brother Bryan died, I could only blame myself for his death. I was personally responsible for what happened to him. Until one evening in a dream, my brother Bryan and I had a conversation about what happened on that fateful day. Yes, it was a dream; yes, it wasn't physically real. Nevertheless, what Bryan said is, "Ray, it wasn't your fault that I died that day. You did everything you could to prevent me from acting out in a way that led to my death. Yes, you were bigger and stronger; however, I was determined to get on that trailer with my sisters and ride it to the dump. I am responsible for what I did that day. I don't blame you and I never have."

Whether real or unreal, the epiphany caused me to acknowledge that we all are personally responsible for how we respond to what happens in our life. Reframing the situation around Bryan's death helped me respond in a more affirming way.



Belief 2: Forgiveness releases me from the perpetrator's hold on me.

Mary was sexually assaulted by her stepfather when she was a teenager. For decades, her hatred and vitriol spilled over onto almost everything she did. It was the poison that caused her to have many debilitating beliefs and thoughts akin to,

- I was unwilling to forgive. There was no way I was going to forgive him. Nevertheless, I came to realize that the person who has caused me so much pain and suffering still was having power and control over me.
- Every time I thought of him, I would be so filled with hate. It was poisoning my heart and mind. It was like he was violating me over and over. I didn't need to tell him that I had forgiven him. I needed to have forgiveness in

Once I became aware how much my self-blame was affecting me, I was able to be free from the personal bondage of self-blame and unforgiveness.

my heart for him and for what he had done. I didn't do it for him; I did it for me.

Belief 3: Forgiveness frees me from my bondage.

I was so hurt and had such sadness over Bryan's death that my relationships suffered, and I was unaware of what was causing it. I certainly didn't think it had anything to do with my brother Bryan. I was in denial and the negative effect it had on me and my relationships was building. My RED amphora vessel was overflowing with debilitating beliefs.



My sister, Gayle, knew I was covering something up that was hurting me deep down inside. She encouraged me to attend a weekend course of self-reflection and awareness. Until I came face to face with my nemesis, “the elephant in the room,” I didn’t even know I had any unforgiveness in my heart. Once I became aware how much my self-blame was affecting me, I was able to be free from the personal bondage of self-blame and unforgiveness.

Belief 4: I am not personally responsible for the mistakes (folly) of my parents.

I am not responsible for what happened to my parents (forefathers). Like all of us, my parents (forefathers) have made mistakes. Their folly is not contagious. It could only affect me if I choose to believe what they believed. They have personal responsibility for what happened in their lives, as I have personal responsibility for what happens in mine.

Belief 5: I am not the same person I was back then.

I have made mistakes. I have hurt some people physically and emotionally. I regret what I have done and how it has caused pain and suffering. I have forgiven myself. My hope is that they will forgive me as well.

Belief 6: I will forgive others in advance for their mischief.

I will practice premeditated forgiveness and forgive them in advance, because I know that we all screw up. That is our human nature. It no longer baffles me when they screw up. When they do, I may be disappointed, but I have already forgiven them.

Belief 7: I wonder what significant emotional event happened in their lives that could cause such unhealthy and reprehensible behavior.



When I observe negative behavior, I have learned to ask myself: What happened in their personal history that would cause them to respond in the way they do? When I ask this question, my mindset shifts from anger, dislike, rejection, and value-judging to understanding. When I take the time to learn more about the people, I begin to understand what causes them to respond the way they do. It doesn't make what they do appropriate or acceptable. Instead, it gives me an opportunity to have a paradigm shift that could result in a new response that I have toward them.

The new mindset becomes:

- The cycle of my hardened heart will continue forever if I continue to justify my victimhood and unforgiveness.
- My hardened heart causes me to be sad, sorrowful, helpless, depressed, and anxious. A forgiving heart causes me to be at peace.

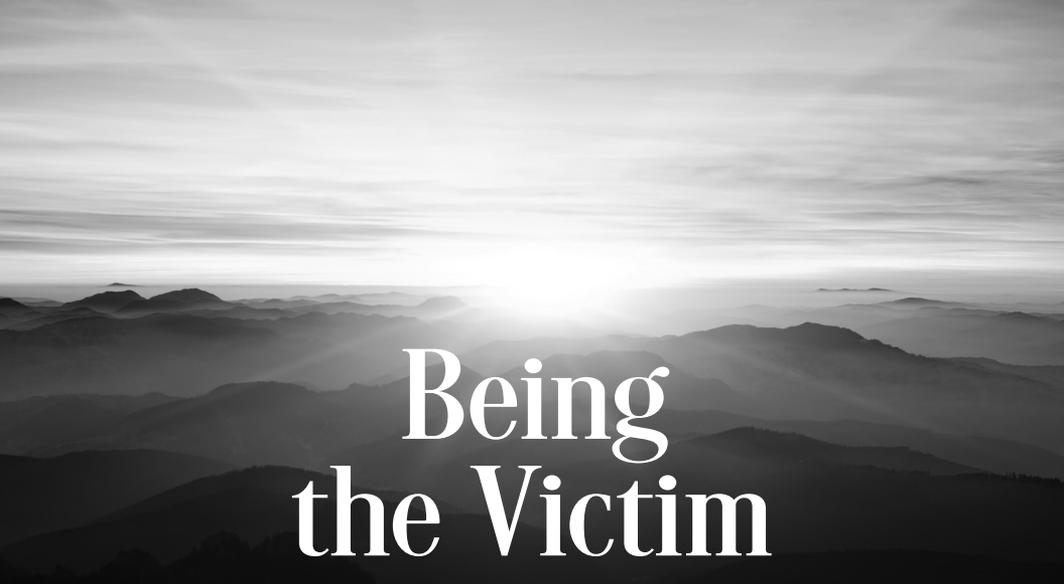
When my son Bryan was about four years old, we were sitting on the couch together and out of the blue he looked up to me and said, "I love you, Daddy." In my nonchalant way, I responded in return with "I love you, too." Bryan responded by grabbing the side of my face to turn my head toward him. He looked squarely into my eyes and said, "No, Daddy, I — love — you" in a drawn out voice of conviction.

Wow! I got that. That was different. That was the first time that I remember in my life of ever feeling deep inside what he just said. I said to myself, "That's what love is." I got it. What I heard was different from what I have ever heard before.



It took a four-year-old to get me to realize that I was not, in fact, hearing the expressions of love from others. He recognized it and knew I wasn't truly absorbing what he was saying and called me out on it!

The BIG Question What is your unforgiving heart costing you?



Being the Victim

Why is it that some of the most responsible people have the least amount of personal responsibility?

The people with the least amount of personal responsibility are the blamers and excuse-makers. Being a habitual blamer and excuse-maker is a debilitating character flaw. The person who takes personal responsibility is being a person of character.

The BIG Question What are you choosing? Are you known as a person who blames and makes excuses? Or are you known as a person who takes personal responsibility?

There is a level of blaming and excuse-making that is so deeply ingrained in the mindset of an individual that it is nearly impossible to change. It becomes so chronically expressed that it permeates a



person's mindset, personality, and social expression. This is the perpetual victim. Perpetual victims seem to be doomed to live a life of victimhood, and it is almost impossible to see it ever changing. For many victims, victimhood is a life sentence.

As in the 12 dichotomies, there are RED amphorae and BLUE amphorae for the victim's dichotomy. RED victims are perpetual victims and will lament their victimization for a lifetime, unless they transcend their victimhood mindsets by forgiving and finding meaning in their pain and suffering.

There are two aspects of victimization that are easily confused. Being victimized is one, and the second being the victim's response. It becomes important to dissect the two aspects of victimization if one is ever to make sense of it and cope with the fallout of the horrific experience in his/her personal history.

Being a victim of a crime, of a drunk driver, of a sexual assault, of a rape, or bullying is never excusable and can never be taken lightly. The emotional scars can be debilitating. Bad things happen, such as being born with a health affliction, contracting a disabling disease, or losing a limb. Being falsely accused by law enforcement can result in being treated unfairly.

People do unthinkable harm to others, sometimes unwittingly and sometimes intentionally.

What happens in life is not fair: the situations and circumstances may be different; still, the burden is the same. We each experience pain and suffering in some way. No one keeps a scorecard that gives points to the level of pain and suffering each one of us has gone through or will go through. Which is worth more points on the pain and suffering scale?

- Dawn being paralyzed in a car accident.



- Being crippled by juvenile rheumatoid arthritis.
- Being a victim of prejudices in the workplace or by law enforcement.
- Paul losing his hands in an accident at age 20.
- Mary being raped.
- Losing your mother at age four.
- Being raised in poverty.
- Being divorced.
- Having an addiction.
- Being treated unfairly because of your ethnicity.
- Being responsible for the injury or death of another person.

Being a victim is real, and few of us will go through life unscathed. We will all experience pain and suffering in some way.

The question surfaces: When it comes to being a victim, are you carrying around a RED amphora or a BLUE amphora? The answer is revealed in how you respond.

Perpetual victims have RED responses similar to these ...

- **Anger!**

They are angry and spew hatred at the ones they blame. It could be anger about an accident or for being assaulted. It could be anger about contracting a disease, for being too short, for not being able to have children, for having a disabled child, or being disabled themselves.

These can be very deep wounds fostering strong emotions that consumes one's internal dialogue; so much so that any consideration of a different self-talk is drowned out by the intensity of the blame.



Perpetual victims are not interested in hearing alternative ways to look at their personal history. They are trapped in a “wish” that it never happened. “I wish that I never went to the bar.” “I wish that I never married her.” “I wish I never had the surgery.” “I wish that I never said what I said.” Their wishful minds are made up, revealing perpetual bitterness and anger.

The BIG Question What has a wishing mindset ever solved?

- **Codependency!**

Perpetual victims are codependent. Angry victims find people to share in their plight. They lament in the echo chamber of their codependent relationships. To be in a relationship with a perpetual victim, one first has to acknowledge and accept the victim’s premise of hatred and anger toward their perpetrators and toward anyone that dismisses the lamenting of their pain. Their position is emboldened when a peer says to them: “I totally understand how you feel. You have every right to feel that way.”

There is a common cause among perpetual victims. Their victimhood is justified in the eyes of their fellow victims. Society has a compassionate understanding of their woes, so it accepts their victimhood, even celebrating it. These can include giving recognition, speaking of retribution, and providing a public forum for them to express themselves and to garner sympathy and understanding.

It is a primary reason why perpetual victims can never break away from a blaming and excuse-making mindset. They never consider changing because their relationships and their identity depend on continuing to be a blaming victim.



- **Pain!**

Emotional pain from past events in your life are difficult to overcome. It is difficult to find meaning to your pain and suffering when you believe that it should have never happened. Without question, you may have had a painful, significant emotional event in your personal history. It could have been horrific. You may have experienced cruelty beyond anything imaginable. You may have experienced a personal loss that defies understanding. You could have been bodily and emotionally harmed. You could have been responsible for another's death, his or her bodily harm, and/or his or her emotional distress.

Life is not fair! It is not a level playing field when it comes to education, social demographics, and family support. This is true! Wishing it was not true, doesn't make it any less true.

You can be in physical pain from a host of chronic diseases or from an accident that leaves you in permanent pain. Physical pain is debilitating. It zaps your energy. It zaps your desire and motivation. It zaps your happiness. It zaps your peace and joy. It can zap your feelings of love.

The pain and suffering of the victim mindset is harsh and real.

When my son Bryan was 3 years old, he had numerous episodes of unexplained pain. At first we thought he was an uncooperative, whiny child. It took months for us to finally get a diagnosis of JRA (juvenile rheumatoid arthritis) that explained his behavior and that his pain was real.



Bryan spent most of his childhood in a wheelchair with persistent pain 24/7. The screams of pain continuously rang out through the house. The frequent sounds of running bath water during the night singled spikes in fever and the need to submerge him in a cool bath to keep his body temperature in check. The pain and suffering Bryan went through was intense and it was exhausting.

Can you imagine reaching a point of watching your child suffer night after night and saying, “This is so unfair; no child should ever have to go through this kind of pain.”

How does one deal with this kind of pain?

We feel their pain. We vicariously experience the suffering of others. We feel compassion and empathy for the pain and suffering of others. Their pain may not be the result of their own doing, so how can they be responsible for their physical ailments?

They may not be responsible for the causes of their physical pain; however, they are responsible for how they respond to their unfortunate situation.

The BIG Question How do you show compassion and empathy to those who suffer from physical and emotional pain without enabling them?



In his book *A Man's Search for Meaning*, Victor Frankl addresses the pain and suffering he experienced when he was incarcerated at Auschwitz during World War II. Frankl writes about how we can lose our liberty; however, we never lose our freedom. No matter how cruel the situation, no matter what the level of pain and suffering, each of us has personal responsibility for how we respond to the situation.

You can respond as a victim that laments your personal history or you can find meaning to your suffering and the opportunities that emerge from it. You have a choice in how you respond. Will it be RED or BLUE?

The BIG Question If you had pain and suffering in your personal history, how are you choosing to respond to it today?

- **Celebrated!**

RED victims are socially and culturally lifted and celebrated. RED victims are recognized for their bravery and courage. The media and government enable victims in a way that assures they stay stuck in their victimhood. They are given aid, reparations, and GoFundMe pages are created for them. We have decided as a society and culture that RED victims have a right to blame and they have a right to make excuses. They are justified.

If blaming and excuse-making is frowned upon as a character flaw, then why are RED victims celebrated? This is the great conundrum in our society.



It seems to be one of the cruelest things we do to the victim. We double down on their victimization by enabling them and keeping them stuck in the bondage of their victimhood. It is sad indeed. Instead of lifting them up, we continue to keep them down. So, what's up with that?

This becomes society's elephant in the room.

Is this the "elephant in your room"?

Being the victim was the "elephant in my room" until I became aware!

What will it be for you?

In the political correctness charged public discourse of today's society, this is a difficult observation to levy against victims. Groups have been organized to espouse their common position and fling their arrows of blame and victimization. If anyone dares confront these groups, the arrows are directed at them as "ad hominem" personal attacks that run amuck. The social outcry is deafening. Lawyers are making careers and gaining notoriety by representing groups of victims.

Seemingly, the news media has found it an attractive story to pursue, and celebrity status is given to high-profile victims. Do celebrities embrace victims to "put on a show" of their own virtue?

Why?

- What has led to this cultural celebration of victimhood?
- How have we come to a point where victims are controlling the social narrative?
- Is this helpful?



- Does it do anything to lift them up?
- Does it do anything to unshackle them from their bondage of victimhood?

Can we do better? This is another BIG question!

- **Being presumptuous.**

Yes, *RED victims are presumptuous*. They expect to be accepted, tolerated, acknowledged, and celebrated for their suffering. We have created that expectation, because we, in fact do, accept, tolerate, acknowledge, and celebrate their plight.

Victims want even more than acceptance; they want us to share in their pain and suffering. They want us to vicariously experience what they have experienced. If we don't, we are insensitive and cruel.

- Why do we play this game with victims?
- Why don't we call them out?
- Why not tell them to get over it?
- Why don't they realize what doesn't kill you makes you stronger?
- Why do I have to suffer with you as you lament your personal history?
- Why don't they see I have pain and suffering in my life, too? You don't see me getting others to organize with me to vomit my "story" all over you and everyone else?
- Why is your pain and suffering greater and more important than my pain and suffering; or, for that matter, anybody else's pain and suffering?



- **Become resentful and unforgiving.**

RED victims want to be resentful and unforgiving. Victims stay in their victimhood because of an unwillingness to forgive. They are unwilling to forgive their perpetrators. They are unwilling to forgive themselves. It is the unwillingness to forgive that keeps them stuck in their victimhood laced with blaming and excuse-making. They may not even see victimhood as a negative; in fact, they get attention for it. They get sympathy and understanding. They can even benefit financially for it, as their peers support them in their codependent need.

Victims believe that their perpetrators don't deserve forgiveness for what they have done. "There is no way I will ever forgive that scumbag for what he did," or a similar response is continuously delivered.

There is no way I will ever forgive my father for what he did.

There is no way I will ever forgive the Germans for what they did to me and my wife in the concentration camps.

There is no way I will ever forgive law enforcement for how they treated me and my forefathers.

An unforgiving mindset and narrative continues to justify victimization. It is difficult for the victim to consider forgiveness because it would reverse their perpetual narrative. How do you save face when you suddenly forgive? How do you ask everyone you have blamed in your victim scheme to stop being a part of your charade?



- **Embracing self-pity.**

RED victims want to wallow in self-pity. They lament being dealt a bad hand and treated unfairly. Their self-talk sounds like: *If it wasn't for _____, my life would be a lot better.* They are defined by the word “if” that precedes their self-talk.

If I only would have come to America when I had a chance to.

If I only would have gone home earlier, this wouldn't have happened.

If I was not disabled

If I wasn't Muslim, Black, Asian, Christian, Jewish, I would be able to

Victims have pity parties. They continuously lament their circumstances and wallow in self-pity. Their victimhood becomes their daily reason for their apathy, procrastination, and anger. They want you to join in their pity party and if you don't, you are not compassionate and understanding enough for them.

- **Manipulate and control others.**

RED victims use their pain to manipulate and control others. Victims attempt to use their pain and suffering to get others to take care of them. Some will exaggerate or fake their pain to avoid having to be responsible.

- **Don't call me out.**

RED victims do not like being called out. They are quickly offended by any suggestion that challenges the hypothesis for their current state of affairs. Addressing victimhood within *Ride the Elephant* is enough to foment the ire of the victims reading it. This is something I do here at the risk of being labeled insensitive and not caring.



My opinion about it is irrelevant. Your opinion is what is important. Your opinion stems from your core beliefs, some of which are true and some which are not true.

Systemic persecution is always wrong. The fact that it has existed against religious and ethnic groups for thousands of years does not excuse it. We all need to look into our hearts and see if we are projecting this injustice onto others and take steps to mitigate it.

With all this wrongness, it is still true that people are subject to systemic persecution for their gender, race, religion, ethnicity, and/or citizenship. It is also true that each of us is personally responsible for how we respond to being persecuted by it. Even though we are victimized by systemic persecution, no one has to live a life as a victim. That is a choice we all make. *And one that you make.*