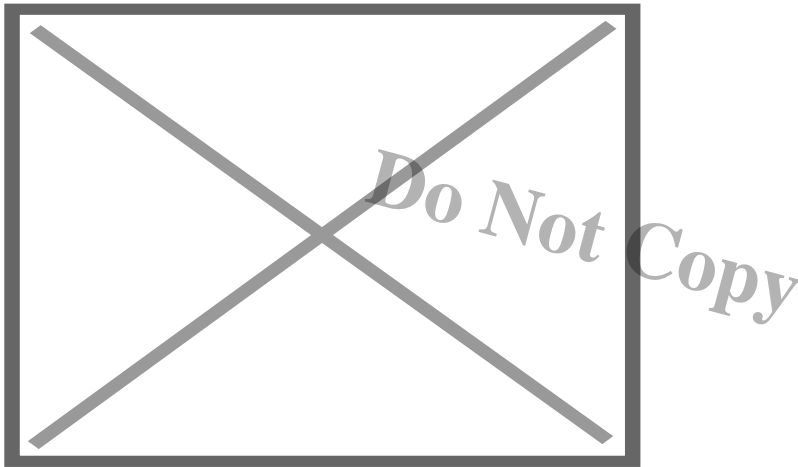


How being responsible will make you happier

## Description

### Prepare 3 Envelopes

I'm sure many of you know the joke about the CEO and the 3 envelopes. For those of you who haven't heard it, it goes like this.



A new CEO starts his first day in a meeting with the outgoing CEO. The departing leader hands him 3 envelopes and says, "for each time that things get tough open one of these envelopes, in order".

Sure enough, not too far into his tenure, the business starts to tank and the board is breathing down his neck. The CEO remembers the envelopes and opens the first one. It reads, "Blame your predecessor." Genius, he thinks! so he throws all the blame on past decisions and structures, and the board gives him a pass.

Another 6 months go by, and things aren't improving still. in a panic, he decides to open the next envelope. It simply has one word: "Reorganize". Great advice he thinks, and proceeds to blow up his org structure and management team, citing inefficiencies and poor leadership from his team, and dodges another blow from his board of directors.

But of course, the reorganization doesn't pay off, losses are piling up and he is again at a loss in deciding what to do. He opens the final envelope. It says, "prepare 3 envelopes".

It's a classic take on the common thinking around leadership and responsibility: don't take any blame who you can and keep your job as long as possible but eventually you will be sacked.

## Itâ€™s not me, itâ€™s you!

I am finding that as I get older I am less patient with other people. I am convinced Iâ€™m slowly turning into one of those two old grumpy muppets on the Muppet Show! Statler and Waldorf. Nothing is ever good enough, and everyone else is shit. I think thatâ€™s why 24-hour news channels do so well: we get to sit on the sidelines and be outraged at other peopleâ€™s stupidity, rudeness, lawbreaking, or just juicy gossip. Donald Trump alone filled 95% of that content for the last 4 years.



Iâ€™m more of a Waldorf!

But in all of that, I do notice a big pattern with human beings who struggle. They spend a lot of effort avoiding responsibility for themselves. Have you noticed the same thing? Whether it is politicians trying to spin their way out of a sex scandal, or corrupt behavior, or children avoiding taking the blame for accidentally burning the house down, or that coworker who throws you under the bus to save their own ass, these people work really hard to not own up to their created mistakes.

Take it further into psychology; people who have relationships that always follow a pattern of ending badly and yet never look at their own behavior and what might have caused it. Or people who feel afraid to stand up to bullies but never work on their own self-esteem, instead of blaming the bullyâ€™s behavior for what going wrong in their life.

Iâ€™ve faced this so much in my life. Iâ€™ve been the person who fails to take responsibility for what goes wrong, and inevitably it always ends up worse off than if I just owned it all from the beginning. And when I actually do step up and own everything going on, I wind up succeeding through really challenging circumstances.

A great mentor of mine, Robert Shereck, once defined responsibility this way: Being responsible means you own whatever happened in the past, present, and future no matter if you were there or not. It's incredibly freeing after the shock of it wears off.

Because being responsible this way gives you absolutely no chance or way to pass it off to someone or something else. You are stuck with whatever is happening to you and only you can work yourself out of it. And it doesn't matter if you caused what is happening or if it's an Act of God or the butterfly effect from some kid in China that blinked too many times, you are still responsible.

Taking responsibility means assuming ownership of your life and everything that happens next. Don't leave it to someone else to make it work for you.

Let's take an example. It's COVID, the country is on lockdown and your company is struggling to survive (hypothetically). Your boss has to make cuts and pulls you into her office and tells you that she has to let you go. You're in a team of 10 people and you are the only one cut. How are you responsible for this?

You can blame your boss, the pandemic, lack of government support, the way you look, the time you got too drunk at the company Christmas party and told off the owner about using 2 ply toilet paper instead of 3 plies. You can go home and wallow in self-pity about how miserable you are and you deserved to be canned. Or you can take this problem as your own, and start to look for causes that are in your control, and potential solutions to get where you want to be.

## Why don't we Take Responsibility?

We all have this fear of taking accountability, that somehow our self-esteem will be destroyed by owning and being fully responsible for ourselves, admitting every mistake, fault, or revenge-based put down of someone. The truth is, we have so much more freedom and happiness by freely admitting we are responsible. Responsibility isn't about taking the blame, it's about eliminating excuses to not look for any and all solutions to a problem. Because if we blame someone else for a thing, then it's that person's job to fix it, right? But if we take responsibility, then we have to do something about it. Guess what? That's leadership.

The reality is being responsible only frames how you respond to life's events it doesn't mean that you caused it. It only means that you are going to lead yourself out of whatever mess you find yourself in. Being responsible gives you freedom from being a victim of life situations. Owning the problem takes energy away from anything anyone else could say about you.

By owning the situation, you make it your job to find a way out. If it's being unhappy in your job, you make it your responsibility in finding happiness; either in confronting the situations that aren't working for you, accepting others points of view and reframing it in a positive light, or finding a different job that brings you that happiness. If you continue to blame someone else for your happiness then you are giving that person control on whether you will be happy or not.

## 5 Ways to Take Responsibility as a Leader

- 1. Take responsibility for your language** – As leaders, all we really contribute to an organization is talking and listening. Whether it's through emails, texts, meetings, team events, all-hands presentations, manifestos, visions, water-cooler chats, taking decisions, one-on-one discussions, or boardroom pitches, they are all some form of saying something or listening to something, so that you can say something in response. How we say things is the most important aspect of being an effective leader. It also very clearly shows whether you take responsibility or hide behind blame and passive-aggressive language so you don't look bad. If you want to become a leader who people see as inspirational, never blame someone else. Never talk about a problem as not yours to solve. Never try to explain why it wasn't your fault, that something went wrong. Simply accept that this is the reality, at this moment, and take full responsibility for leading to a solution.
- 2. Take responsibility in your organization** – It can be a trap to be in middle management and look at the rat's nest of an org chart, and say to yourself, "well this problem belongs somewhere else, so I'm gonna walk away now and let it burn". Not only is this horrible leadership, but it can also backfire on you because someone else could decide it is your problem to solve. Instead, if you see a problem take responsibility for it to be handed over to whomever you think is the right person, and make sure they understand it from your perspective. And offer to help. They will remember your generosity.
- 3. Take responsibility for the hand you're dealt** – Shit happens. All the time. Just when you think life is getting to a good place. I swear it feels on purpose sometimes. So much is out of your control. Regardless, accept that it is your reality and focus on dealing with it. Don't use life as an excuse to stop being a leader. You can blame Covid, the economy, a new competitor, a major product failure, or a supplier catastrophe for the reason that you don't perform. Or take responsibility for the hand you're dealt and roll up your sleeves to find a way forward.
- 4. Take responsibility for your actions** – When someone comes to you and has the courage to say, "I don't like what you did", then take it. Do not make excuses, do not point the finger elsewhere, do not get defensive or attack them. Just take it. Accept the feedback honestly, openly, and with empathy. Put yourself in their position and recognize that you are the cause in the matter. And work to make it right.
- 5. Take responsibility for your inactions** – The same goes for when you are called out for not doing something. Just take it. Accept it and own it. And do what you can to make it right. This is something you can call yourself out for too. How many times have you left a meeting thinking you should have said something, done more, called out bad behaviour, or offered help? Then take responsibility, go to that person and tell them your regret and ask to help make that right. It's never too late to own up to something.

Once you accept full responsibility for the world you live in and the choices you make, you have no one else to blame or rely on to make you happy. Take charge of your life by accepting what you have done right and wrong, what has happened to you that's out of your control, and the problems that are at your feet. Then get to work solving them with compassion and empathy.

### Category

1. Uncategorized

### Date Created

December 10, 2020

**Author**

platypussolutionsadmin

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