Ep #36: Blame vs. Responsibility

Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Hey, what's up everyone? Welcome to episode 36. Check it out. This is going to be an amazing episode. We are going to talk about the difference between blame and responsibility. Huge topic. Hey, when is the last time you went over to my website and left me a comment. I am missing you there. Go there, leave me a comment. Let's talk. Let's chat together.

Let's get started. What is the difference between blame and responsibility? I got this topic because I was coaching someone recently and I was teaching her the difference. I was trying to teach her the difference between taking responsibility for something vs. blaming for something. Now there's two ways this works. In one instance we blame other people. In another instance we blame ourselves. It gets a little tricky. If we're going to take responsibility, how is that different from not blaming ourselves? It's a huge difference, and in fact, they're on complete opposite ends of the spectrum. Taking responsibility for how we feel, for what we do, for what we think, for the results we get in our life, is the opposite of blaming.

Here's how you know the difference. The main difference is in how you feel. That's how you know if you're taking responsibility or if you're blaming. I want to talk first about how this affects relationships with other people. First and foremost I want to remind you that feelings are always self-generated, always. It's easy to remember this when we're coaching someone else. It's easy to remember this when we're looking at someone else. But when we are feeling crappy or we're feeling upset or we're feeling hurt, that's when it's really difficult to remember that all feelings are always self-generated. We believe our feelings or caused by other people. It's never the case. Other people can't cause us to feel anything.

When we blame someone else for how we feel we are not taking responsibility for how we feel. We've talked about this a lot before. It's the difference between emotional childhood and emotional adulthood. But, if you think about it, if you want to get really clear on it, when you

say that person made me angry; that person hurt my feelings; that person caused me to have a bad day; that person frustrates me ... How many of us say that all the time? We all do. We all blame other people for how we feel. But what we're doing is we're basically saying no, that feeling wasn't self-generated. That feeling was caused by this person. We're giving that person for our emotional life. we are delegating responsibility to them as if they are responsible for how we feel.

Now here's the good news: no one is that powerful. Nobody can generate a feeling for us. That is something only we can do. When you're blaming someone you're holding them accountable. You're giving them credit for a feeling that you're having, an experience that you're having, a problem that you're having. When you do that you completely disempower yourself. You completely lose your ability to respond. Response, ability. When you blame you give it all to them. If they are the cause of how you feel then they'll be the cause of you not feeling that way, so then they have to take some action or do something in order to change how you feel.

Now most of us when we think someone's hurt our feelings do not want to have to rely on them to feel better, and yet that's what most of us do. We delegate our emotional life to them and we want them to change it. No matter what someone does, when we take responsibility for how we feel about it, then we are empowered to feel better, to feel different. We are empowered to respond the way we want to respond without feeling out of control and without being reactive.

Now, some people will say to me in that moment it sure doesn't seem like I have the ability. I can relate to that. There are times when I snap at people or I get frustrated and I blame the other person. I say "You're bugging me. You're frustrating me. You're driving me crazy." But that's never true. It really seems true though, doesn't it? But it really is never true. No one can drive you crazy.

I have a really good girlfriend of mine. Her name's Lisa and she has an amazing husband, Jim. Jim likes to whistle and he whistles all the time. Whistling makes me crazy. Nobody should be whistling. I don't like whistling; I don't want you whistling, especially when we're

playing cards. Trying to focus here. Why are you whistling? What fascinates me is he will whistle away and his wife, who lives with him, who is sitting right next to him in this card game, is completely unaffected by the whistling. I do not understand it. The whistling needs to stop immediately.

It's such a great example because it's the same thing happening, the whistling. To Lisa it's totally fine. It doesn't bother her at all. It's great. To me, it's crazy. What's the difference? My thinking about it. Her thinking about the whistling is oh, it's nice. It's not a problem. It's great. I don't really notice it.

For me, it's like I need you to stop immediately. I can't stand the whistling. I am responsible for being annoyed. he's not responsible for me being annoyed because then he'd also be responsible for her not being annoyed. You see how that works? I have to take responsibility for my own annoyance. Now, if I'm blaming him I might be like "Jim, really with the whistling? Could you please stop the whistling? It's really annoying." I have made it all about the whistling is annoying in and of itself.

Or, if I take responsibility for being annoyed I may not say anything or I may say "Hey, would you please mind not whistling if it's the same to you because I have some thoughts about it." That would be fine. But I'm coming from a place of I'm responsible for how I feel about this. I know I'm the one causing this for myself. I can come from a place of non-annoyance actually to ask him to stop. Or I can just change my thoughts about it, which I've been able to do. I'm fascinated to sit down with him and do this now because I can see how my thoughts start triggering me and I think that it's him. Then I feel so disempowered by it and then it makes me crazy. It's so funny to watch my own brain do that to myself.

It's true with bigger things, like if someone yells at you, if someone forgets your birthday, if somebody tells you something you don't want to hear, if one of your kids says something rude. whatever. You get to decide how you're going to feel about it. You can either think it's no big deal or you can think oh my gosh, we can never be friends again. Think about that. Are you blaming someone for how you feel? Are you blaming someone for what you're doing? Are you blaming

someone for the way you're reacting, for how you're letting yourself behave? I had a bad day. Blaming the people in your life. Blaming your boss for anyone of your thoughts, feelings, or actions. That is blaming.

The way that you know that you're blaming is it feels negative. You will notice that you feel disempowered and weak and hopeless and out of control. That's how you know when you're blaming. Blaming is never useful. All it does is gives your power away. It gives credit to something that isn't responsible. It's like when people say "When it is raining outside I always feel miserable," as if the weather is responsible for how that person feels. That person is responsible for how they feel. When the sun comes out, when any of the thoughts about it are what are going to determine it, the associations with it are what is going to determine it. For most normal people that is the case.

Now let's talk a little bit about blame vs. responsibility when it comes to our selves. What's the difference between blaming ourselves for overeating, blaming ourselves for overspending, blaming ourselves for getting in the fight with the husband vs. taking responsibility for it? Blaming is I'm beating you up. I'm telling you that it's your fault and you're stupid and you didn't do it right. It's always negative. Blame is always painful. When someone blames you for something you can associate that. It's usually a negative experience.

Now when you take responsibility for it notice immediately how empowered you feel. It's so empowering to take responsibility, even for something that you wish you hadn't done. I chose to eat a box of Oreos vs. how dare you, what's wrong with you, you're so out of control. That's blame. I chose to do it. I feel upset because of what I'm thinking. God, I can't even tell you how many times a day I tell myself that. The reason you feel this way is because of a thought you're thinking. That is the ultimate in responsibility. I'm taking responsibility for how I feel. I'm describing to myself why I'm feeling that way. I'm owning that it's a thought in my brain, and it gives me so much empowerment to be able to change if I want. It's just one thought away vs. beating myself up and blaming myself for it and making myself wrong.

If you are working on a relationship with somebody and you want your relationship to better, you can blame them for how you feel, you can blame yourself for how you feel, or you can take responsibility for it. The beauty of taking responsibility is then you start to make the change you want to make. Blame leads to no action because it's completely disempowering. You're beating yourself up. You're beating the other person up, whether it's mentally or verbally. If you do a full model on blame you will notice that all it does is disempower you. All it does is lead you with not wanting to take any action; whereas when you take responsibility and you own something, then you develop an authority over it. That's when you begin to make the change that you want to make in the relationship.

Now, when you own all of those parts of you, when you own the part of you that snapped at someone ... Here's the difference. I'll say "Oh, the reason I snapped at my mom is because she was being rude" vs. "The reason I snapped at my mom is because I didn't manage my emotional life there. I was in emotional childhood. I didn't take control over my mind and find a more peaceful place. I reacted. I snapped. That's on me. She didn't make me do that. She's not responsible for what I do. I am. I'm the reason I snapped at my mom. My mom is not the reason that I snapped at her."

I may not be able to change what my mom did but I can definitely change that I snapped at her, because that's what's upsetting me. Now if I blame her the only way I can stop snapping is if she changes. But the truth is I can stop snapping even without her changing. I have the ability, response ability, I have the ability to respond the way I want when I take responsibility for how I'm thinking about something, for how I'm feeling about something, and for how I'm acting towards someone.

Here's the thing. You get to decide in every situation how you want to feel. It's so powerful because if you feel upset about something you can own it. It doesn't mean you have to change how you're going to feel. Maybe you want to be upset about something. That's valid, but wanting to be upset and taking responsibility for feeling upset is very different than blaming someone else for being upset. If my husband comes in here and he says "How are you feeling?" and I'll say "I'm

upset." "Why are you upset?" "She did this, that, this, that, this, that; and that made me mad." I'm going to be totally disempowered.

I'm not saying this just didn't happen to me yesterday. I'm not saying that at all. I'm not saying that allegedly there was a situation where I was very angry and blaming someone else. I told this situation to my husband and I said "Doesn't that make you so mad?" He's like "Not at all. It's really not a big deal." I'm like "Listen to me, buddy. We're going to be upset about this. This situation is upsetting." It really showed me he wasn't upset about it at all. He really didn't think it was a big deal at all. He was enjoying his day. He wasn't angry at all. He wasn't willing to even entertain the fact that he should be angry about this. He completely let it go, and it was really fascinating.

Now I'm not saying that I immediately switched it off, because I didn't. I was really indulging in anger and really trying to control this other person and get this person to do something differently because I was feeling angry. I was in a hurry. That's how I knew. I was in a hurry to talk to this person and change how they felt and change what they did so I could feel better.

Now this person did not change how they felt. We eventually had to agree to disagree, because I was defiant and they were defiant. At the end of the day it's so fascinating because I could have handled the whole situation so much better had I not been so angry and so disempowered in my reaction. Then I behaved in a way that I wasn't proud of. What was funny is the whole reason I was angry is because someone else wasn't behaving in a way that I felt proud of. I ended up creating that exact situation for myself.

Ask yourself when you're in situations, when you're working on relationships: Am I in blame? Am in self blame, or am I in responsibility? The way that you know the answer is by how you feel. Do you feel disempowered or do you feel empowered? Now, sometimes taking responsibility for a mistake you've made can be humbling, but it will also feel empowering. Owning your mistakes, owning your misgivings, owning things that you did that you're not proud of, doesn't always feel like rainbows and daisies; but if you take responsibility for it and own it, it feels like empowerment. It doesn't feel like hopelessness or out of control or rage. It feels likes yes,

that's me. I did that. I own it and it's okay. I can move on from it. Self-blame is you did this. You're wrong. You should be ashamed. You're awful. What's wrong with you? Can't you get your act together? That's blame.

If you can shift in your life to taking responsibility for all of your mistakes, for anything you do wrong, in your own mind owning it all, owning all of your actions, owning all of your results, owning all of your feelings, you're not going to feel happy all the time but you will not feel disempowered. You will not feel out of control. From there you can make the most change in your life. When you retain your response ability, that's when you can change your life.

I would love to hear for you guys how you have identified the difference between blame, self-blame, and self-responsibility, and how you distinguished it in your relationships with yourself and with the people in your life that you love - and especially the people in your life that you don't necessarily love. I'd love to hear all about it. All right, everybody. I'll talk to you next week. Take care. Bye bye.
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