

WALKING THE LEADERSHIP FLOORS

Is the Victim Virus Undermining Your Organization or Business? (Segment 2)

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Exiting the Victim Trap and Gaining Altitude

The good news is that just as the victim virus is universal, its cure is also common to all cultures. There is only one known way to exit the victim colony and become an owner. **Change your story.** A manager's response-ability level changes when his or her story changes. The idea is to take ownership of the problem situation so you can ignite the inner genius you need to become part of the solution. Remember that the victim manager does not lack capacity. What is implicated here is the habitual avoidance of the resolve to change, to rise to challenges and to grow to a more effective version of self.

When leaders and managers begin to see themselves as the ones that need to change, the entire system must respond. When managers see themselves as the main characters in the story of their own career destiny and of their organization's success, they start to expand with a renewed sense of power. **Owners** adopt one fundamental approach to their responsibility that victims tend to avoid. They unconditionally accept their roles as the main characters in their own lives. By doing this, owners claim for themselves the power to transform the undesirable situation, even at the risk of losing their alleged innocence.

There are only two sets of choices on the table for leaders and managers;

1. You are innocent, and thus powerless and irrelevant, or
2. You are effective, and so response-able and indispensable.

Only one of the two choices empowers and challenges a manager to change, grow, and become a more effective version of self. Which do you choose? What are the obstacles you see with staying with your desired choice?

On the face of it, victim excuses tend to sound quite reasonable. How in the world will someone expect us not to be late when half a million silly drivers decided to get on the road on the same day we needed to get to an event early? What better reason to be late than a heavy rain that decided to sabotage our best plans? The victim mindset is well-practiced on verbal fencing. The point though is that operational effectiveness is not about cosmetic appearances “on the face of things.” Stuff happens all the time – and this is what separates the prepared from the surprised. Prepared managers do not have magical powers over the rain or traffic; they just anticipate that stuff may happen. Both their vision and strategy take this fact into account. They thus factor a Plan B into the equation, as a rule.

When effective managers answer questions in the thick of challenges, they tell you what they have done or will do to solve the current problem and forestall recurrence. They calm your nerves. In the cases above, all the answers did was to help us buy innocence and glorify ineffectiveness with ‘truth’ that is being used as a drug. This dubious truth seeks sympathy because it lacks power. We may buy both sympathy and time all right, but for the organization to survive and thrive, it will need to find troopers to make up for the leakage and help execute a winning strategy. You see, the CEO and the executive leadership team cannot go to the stakeholders to plead innocence. So why offer them just that? Why not drive results and resolve?

Truth without operational power is like a tranquilizing drug. It dulls the brain and depresses a business manager’s capacity to be great at solving problems. The consequences here carry through, far beyond the work place. Our findings show that the way you do one thing is a great indication of the way you do everything.

The next time the victim viruses urges us to flash a defensive answer or comment on the face of a business problem, the question to first ask is; “How does my perspective help me to become an effective player in solving the problem?” If your perspective does not make you a problem solver, you are shortchanging both the organization and yourself. It is like perpetually being on the reserve bench while your team mates are out in the field playing to win. Even more importantly, if the problem will go away should another manager take charge of your area, you may have become the endangered species in the team. I bet you don’t want that. Nobody does.

Are you great at providing solutions to business problems? The way to know is to check in with your internal customers, and certainly with your boss. Ask them to be unreservedly, if not brutally, honest. If you can handle the truth, you are on the way to becoming an owner

The danger with being an innocent victim is that this frame of mind hurts both the person and the business. Innocence is a very brittle quality, one that is equally a very expensive habit to own. The fact of the **powerlessness** of a victim has a telling consequence. You are in the market for sure, but you have not come with helping hands. You are a licensed driver that cannot be trusted with the key to the Cadillac. The most telling fear the victim must live with day by day is the fear of change. And the biggest risk on the horizon when we resist change is one of irrelevance.

If our mindset is one that lacks operational power, we cannot make things happen because things are always “happening to us.” We only watch things happen and either complain or feed off of other victims’ tranquilizing support. What must be remembered here is that just as it is often said that misery loves company, fellow victims can never help a victim become an owner. While they need the next victim in their camp the same way the drug dealer needs another addict, what is certain is that *your drug dealer is not your friend*. The idea is to identify the owners in your group and seek to model your growth plan around the things you admire in the way they achieve results.

The victim personality is not the resume of a manager you want to work for you. And this is not a manager any organization willingly seeks to retain. The trick to liberation is to tell a new story – one that has a laser-sharp focus on actions and results. Tell your audience what you understand the problem to be and what you have done or will do to radically improve the results. The typical question from stakeholders on this subject is “*Where is the beef?*” We like to call this the Executive Summary. The owner’s approach is to cut out the fat so the beef can emerge and speak for itself. The effective manager’s results must speak.

Using Your Owner’s Manual

The challenge and thrill of leadership is that every business question tackled effectively increases the owner’s power. This requires action, not defensiveness. And when we master the art of taking ownership, we begin to tone our *leadership effectiveness muscles* and thus

begin to grow in relevance. This is most liberating since it guarantees that the manager has the requisite *elasticity and bandwidth* to operate across several *operational altitudes*.

Without capacity and muscles, a victim manager is at best a weak link in the chain, and in bad cases, decidedly toxic to the success of the team. To become owners, managers must insist that the buck stop at their table. Effective managers do not “pass the buck,” they close the sale. They make the decisions and accept the ultimate responsibility for those decisions. This is the only way to become part of the solution. This is not about blaming one’s self. The idea here is that owners see themselves as an integral part of the system that generated an unwanted result and hence as the leverage point to change the system in a way that it produces a better result. *Owners are therefore change agents.*

It is important to keep in mind that being an owner has nothing to do with being the ‘high and mighty.’ The ownership mindset is about rising to challenges with equanimity and demonstrating proprietary interest in the success of the organization. Unlike victims, owners focus their attention on those factors they can influence, gradually discovering that by coming from this position of helpfulness and strength, they are growing the *experiential and proprietary muscles* they need to become even more valuable and powerful. The owner’s self-esteem is not anchored on appearing innocent; rather it is a factor of doing the very best that is possible and thus being the best version of self that is possible.