

BEING A RESPONSIBLE PERSON

EDPSY/EDAC 629

Shirley Robbins

The act of being responsible is, in my opinion, one of the most important aspects of one's life. The acceptance of responsibility for your own actions identifies you as a strong, honest, and self-reliant person. In order to earn both self-respect and respect from others, we must develop our personal responsibility.

The acceptance of responsibility is something parents work toward teaching their children so they will be able to take control of their lives and make rational decisions. It's such things as if it's your job do it, if you say you will do something do it, and if it's your bill pay it!!

I believe that how we accept responsibility is determined by:

1. How we feel about ourselves
2. How we feel about others
3. The quality of decisions we make throughout our life.

How we feel about ourselves is the beginning step toward becoming a responsible person. It is important that we develop a sense of self-worth and establish moral values for ourselves which generate the desire to become the best that we can be.

Stephen Covey discusses responsibility in his book THE SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE. He says "look at the word responsibility--response-ability--the ability to choose your response". He identifies responsible people as those who do not blame circumstances, conditions or conditioning for their behavior. Covey states that our behavior is a product of our own conscious choice, based on values, rather than a product of our conditions, based on feeling. This in Covey's terms is a "proactive" person.

Covey also discusses in his book the fact that many people wait for something to happen or someone to take care of them. But, the people who get the good job, that new home or that vacation trip they desire first must be the solution to the problem and not the problem. These people use their initiative to do whatever must be done to realize their desire.

Developing a good self-image is not always the easiest thing for us to do especially with all the outside influences that could tend to make us feel otherwise. But, we each should take time to search our souls to determine the path we want to follow or we may find ourselves in a very uncomfortable place.

It is a normal response to blame others for our circumstances. But, once we examine the situation and accept responsibility for our place in life, moving forward becomes much easier. We make our own choices. And, I have also learned that we must also allow others to make their own choices. We certainly cannot control the actions or feelings of anyone but ourselves. This is a hard lesson to learn for most wives and mothers. We somehow would like to believe that we can make choices for our loved ones, but in the final analysis, we can only hope we have had a positive influence. The choices are theirs to make. We must accept their choices as appropriate for them whether we agree or not and continue to love them for who they are.

The authors of ADJUSTMENT AND GROWTH, THE CHALLENGES OF LIFE, Spencer A. Rathus and Jeffrey S. Nevid describe values as the importance we place on objects and things. They state that our values depend on our personal goals and tend to place limits on the means we tend to use to reach them. They also identify determining one's values as an essential aspect of the development of the self. During periods of our life, our values may be fluctuating and this is a very unsettling experience, or a crisis in self-identity. They also state that until we make our beliefs consistent and meaningful, we may be subject to the whims and opinions of others.

These authors also define self-concept as your impression or concept of yourself. This includes your own listing of the personal traits (fairness, competence, sociability, and so on) which you consider important, and your evaluation of how you rate according to these traits. The self-concept, according to these authors, also includes your sense of personal worth or self-esteem. This is defined as your sense of who and what you would like to be and your sense of your competence to meet your goals.

So, as I mentioned, I believe that how we feel about ourselves is the first step to determining the choice we make relative to becoming a responsible person.

Step two in determining whether we choose to become a responsible person is how we feel about others. Do we feel that people are basically good or bad? Do we treat others as we would like to be treated? Do we allow others to make our choices for us or influence our behavior negatively?

It is important that we make a conscious decision to accept others for who they are. We are each unique people with unique beliefs and behaviors. The acceptance of this reality is imperative to becoming a responsible person.

Page -3-

Being a Responsible Person

March 20, 1994

We may or may not personally approve of someone else's behavior, habits or beliefs. But, again, we can only make choices for ourselves. It is really very difficult to accept someone with complete opposite beliefs from your own. People just do not conform to our standards totally. We may find that we agree with most of the personality traits of our best friend, but some of their behavior just doesn't quite meet our standards. Should we make a decision to totally reject this person or love them for who they are? This is a big question and, for most people, it seems difficult to love their friend for who they are rather than focus on the traits of that friend which they disagree. Accepting people for who they are whether we agree with them totally is one of the hardest lessons to learn. Some people never learn to accept others--they prefer to criticize until they have convinced themselves that the person is not someone they choose to keep company. I'm sure many of us have difficulty with this concept and cause ourselves much anguish and lost opportunities.

Personally, I enjoy people. But, I know that I have a problem accepting people who are irresponsible and do not accept responsibility for their own actions. I also have a problem with people who have little consideration for others. So, I have learned to enjoy people on the surface and try not to become involved in their lives. I can then accept the fact that I have satisfying relationships with most everyone I encounter.

I believe that having consideration for the feelings of others is a major characteristic of being a responsible person. We have the distinct right to reach out for whatever we desire in this life--as long as acquiring our desire doesn't hurt someone else. I still believe in the old saying, "what goes around comes around." Or as the Bible states, "you reap what you sow." So, in my opinion, it never pays for anyone to gain through hurting someone else.

Thirdly, the quality of our decisions effect whether we become a responsible person. Admittedly, we will make some wrong decisions along the way. But, how we respond to the results of these decisions is the key. In Anthony Robbins book AWAKEN THE GIANT WITHIN he relates to this issue by stating that he has determined that no matter what decisions he makes, he will be flexible, look at the consequences, learn from them, and use those lessons to make better decisions in the future. He says, "Those seemingly bad or painful experiences are sometimes the most important. When people succeed, they tend to party; when they fail, they tend to ponder, and they begin to make new distinctions that will enhance the quality of their lives. We must commit to learning from our mistakes, rather than beating ourselves up, or we're destined to make the same mistakes in the future."

Unfortunately, many of us have times in our lives where we begin to believe that there is no answer for our desperation. But, we all have known of people who have risen to great heights after a period of depression in their lives. We have choices when these times arrive also. We can decide to feel sorry for ourselves and blame others for our circumstances or we can decide to look for opportunities that may be available to us. It is good to remember what Julie Andrews said in the movie, THE SOUND OF MUSIC, "WHEN GOD CLOSES A DOOR HE OPENS A WINDOW." We must all do our very best to have faith and keep working toward becoming the best that we can be.

Anthony Robbins has six key elements relative to making decisions that he feels shape our lives. These elements are:

1. **Remember the true power of making decisions.** A real decision is measured by the fact that you've taken new action.
2. **Realize that the hardest step in achieving anything is making a true commitment--a true decision.** You know you have truly made a decision when action flows from it.
3. **Make decisions often.** Muscles get stronger with use, and so it is with decision-making muscles.
4. **Learn from your decisions.** Rather than focus on the short-term setback, choose instead to learn lessons that can save you time, money, or pain, and that will give you the ability to succeed in the future.
5. **Stay committed to your decisions, but stay flexible in your approach.** Once you've decided who you want to be as a person, for example, don't get stuck on the means to achieving it. It's the end you're after.
6. **Enjoy making decisions.** "Life is either a daring adventure or nothing." Helen Keller

Know that your decisions create the results of your life. Each of these authors have stressed the importance of how we think and the decisions we make as being the ultimate determinate of our destiny. So, developing skills to change our pattern of negative thinking to positive and skills toward improved decision-making can pave the way to a new adventure in our lives. This is, in my opinion, a key to being a responsible person.

Page -5-
Being a Responsible Person
March 20, 1994

In summary, the elements of how we feel about ourselves, how we feel about others, and the quality of our decisions determine how successful we are in becoming a responsible person.

Not only do others have much more respect for us when we accept our responsibilities, but we have much more respect for ourselves. We can look at ourselves with a positive view and feel that we are aiming toward becoming the best that we can be.

From time to time we all look back at our past experiences and wish that we could change some of the painful experiences, but if we could only realize that chances are we would react the same as before because we had a specific lesson to learn. We must try to remember that life runs in cycles as do the seasons. There is a real need for us all to have some winter in our lives so that we can look forward to the enjoyment of spring.

So, being responsible, says to live life to the fullest and at the same time treat yourself and others with respect and love. We only pass this way once (I think) and we must take responsibility for making this journey a wonderful adventure.

Shirley Robbins