

IT'S YOUR LIFE SO MAKE THE MOST OF IT

One of the most important ingredients in your personal development is taking real responsibility for your actions. This requires that you consciously become the cause of the results that you want. Refuse to behave like a victim ... or to wait for someone to save you from life's problems.

KEYS TO SELF-RESPONSIBILITY

To reach your full potential, you need to take responsibility for your actions in meaningful ways ...

Consciousness. You have a choice—you can pay attention and be fully present when you are making critical decisions, such as working on a project, reading your performance review or deciding whether to have another drink. Or you can be physically present but mentally absent during these activities. Either way, you are responsible for the level of consciousness you bring to any occasion—and you are responsible for the results.

Decisions and actions. It is tempting to “disconnect” from our choices—to insist that someone or something is driving us to behave the way we do. Other people don't make you talk or act in certain ways. You are responsible for how you speak and listen ... whether you act rationally or not ... whether you treat others fairly or unfairly ... whether you keep your promises or break them. Once you recognize that you are the source of your own decisions and actions, you are far more likely to proceed wisely—and to act in ways that will not cause embarrassment or regret later.

Fulfillment of desires. A major cause of unhappiness or frustration is imagining that someone will come along to “rescue” you—to solve your problems and fulfill your wishes. A self-responsible person recognizes that no one is coming to make life right or to “fix” things. You acknowledge that nothing will get better unless you do something to make it happen.

Beliefs and values. Many people are happy to reflect passively what others believe and value. Or they assume that their ideas arise naturally out of their feelings—by instinct. Self-responsible people work to become aware of their beliefs and values ... to critically scrutinize them ... to seek out people who see things differently ... and then to make up their own minds.

Setting priorities. The way we spend time and energy is either in sync with our values or out of sync with what we claim is important. If you understand that the way you prioritize your time is your own choice, you are more likely to correct the contradictions. Instead of being overwhelmed or neglecting people and activities that are important to you, you reexamine your values or set priorities that make more sense.

Choice of companions. You can blame and resent others when they repeatedly hurt or disappoint you. You can feel sorry for yourself. Or you can recognize your responsibility for choosing with whom you spend time ... and make different choices.

Actions in response to feelings and emotions. When you're angry, you have the urge to lash out. When you're hurt, you may feel like sulking. When you're impatient, you may want to drive too fast. But you don't

have to act on every feeling or urge. When you accept responsibility for the actions you take, you act more thoughtfully ... less impulsively ... and with better results.

Happiness. If you believe your happiness is primarily in your own hands, you give yourself enormous power. You don't wait for events or other people to make you happy. If something is wrong, your response is not, “Someone's got to do something!” but “What can I do?”

One's own life and well being. In taking responsibility for your life, you will recognize other people's rights to do the same. Other people do not exist as means to your ends, any more than you live in service to their goals. People may choose to help me another—voluntarily. Life is usually more pleasant when they do so. But no one is born with a right to other people's assets or energy—despite the attitude of entitlement that is so prevalent today.

Learning self-responsibility. You can become more responsible by asking yourself two powerful questions several times a day ...

- What possibilities for action exist?
- What can I do?

Instead of just saying, “I want ...,” try asking yourself, “What am I willing to do to get what I want?” To become more aware of whether you are acting responsibly, ask yourself, If I wanted to be fully self-responsible right now, what would I be doing?

Try this exercise: Every morning for one week, write six to 10 endings to each of the following sentences ...

- If I operate a little more self-responsibly today, I will ...
- If I am 5% more self-responsible in my relationships, I will ...
- If I accept responsibility for my choices and decisions, I will ...

Don't worry about what you should say. Just write the first words that come to mind. Over the weekend, reread the week's sentences. Then write six to 10 endings for this sentence ...

- If any of what I wrote this week is true, it might be helpful if I ...

Done consistently, this exercise helps to shift your mental focus. Changes are often quick—and dramatic.