

WORK MATTERS



SHANKAR R.
SANTHIRAM

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

To achieve results, take ownership of your actions

IT is the first week of 2017 and there is one thing I would really like to focus on that will add value to you this year. The ultimate truth is that there is only person who is responsible for the quality of your life. And that person is you.

From a young age, you are conditioned to apportion blame to others. It is an instinctive reaction that all of us seem to get doomed with.

You come to work late, and of course you tell your boss that there is a traffic jam because the school holidays are over. Really? You did not factor that in? Somehow, unbeknownst to you, school kids conspired to impede your journey to work?

Or, after a heavy dressing-down from your boss because you forgot to do something, you rush home to your spouse and moan spitefully. You complain that your superiors only notice the bad things you do, and never the good that you deliver. I only have one retort for this; welcome to the real world.

Sometime ago, I had an employee who fortunately elected to leave the job, saving me the trouble of firing him. He was pleasant and warm, but totally ineffective. My main problem with him was that he never realised that everything that happened to him, was due to his lack of personal efficacy.

His car would break down regularly, but he would just say that it was because his car was old, and not because he chose not to maintain it properly. Every training or coaching proposal he sent out representing my company, had multiple mistakes.

His argument to me was the mistakes were there as I had often pressured him to get the proposals out to clients quickly. It had nothing to do with the fact that he was simply "cut-

ting and pasting" chunks of copy from older proposals, without customising them, hence making rudimentary errors.

You might be like this fellow. If you are, I implore you to drop this attitude, right away.

The consequences of thinking like this are far more serious than simply being sidelined for a promotion or not getting a bonus at the end of the year. You might get fired from your job, or even worse, lose huge amounts of money that you have carefully squirrelled away.

I speak from personal experience. About 10 years ago, I went into partnership with an Italian trader to open a textile boutique in Kuala Lumpur. I had only known him previously through my dealings as a consultant for large textile retailer. He was a gregarious and convivial man. But I should have trusted my wife, Susanna, who always maintained that there was something dodgy about him. We opened the outlet and I had a minority 20 per cent stake in the business.

But because I was the local partner, I had to sign many documents, including the tenancy agreement that made both partners jointly and severally liable for the rent. After a decent run in the first few months, business slumped badly.

After two years of ploughing on with limited results, my partner and I decided to shut shop. At that time, the biggest debt that the business

had was unpaid rent for the outlet amounting to over RM200,000. He promised to make this payment and I duly informed the landlord. Twelve months after closing the business, he still had not settled this payment. And my attempts to contact him proved futile. The landlord, a large and prestigious mall, initiated legal proceedings. But not against the company, but against me personally. By this point the RM200,000 had grown with compounding interest and legal fees to nearly RM300,000.

It was an extremely tough lesson in life. But, an immensely valuable one for me. It taught me that if I want to create a life with real results, then I was going to have to take 100 per cent responsibility for my own thoughts.

Even though I went to university and studied law, I did not fully comprehend the meaning of "jointly and severally liable" for the rent. It simply meant that I could be personally held responsible for the amount due. And as my rogue Italian partner absconded, the landlord decided it was easier to come after me, rather than trying to find him in Italy.

Of course, I was incensed. How could they do this to me? I angrily told them that they knew that I was a minority shareholder in the business, and that it was unfair of them to seek the payment from me. But, this did not detract them from proceeding with the legal suit against me.

I spent months being livid and upset. I got my solicitor to fight their lawsuit. Until it dawned on me one day that I was fully and completely responsible for the entire fiasco. I had gone into partnership with someone I had very little background

knowledge about; I went into a business selling textiles when I am primarily a human capital development specialist; and most importantly, I signed the tenancy agreement without truly understanding the consequences. None of this had anything to do with anyone else. They were all my own choices, and I simply had to take responsibility. So, I stopped moaning and fighting. Instead, I negotiated and paid up. That year, I lost all my personal savings from the previous three years.

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It taught me that if I want to create a life with real results, then I was going to have to take 100 per cent responsibility for my own thoughts, words and deeds. I had to give up all my excuses, my "victim" mentality, and my internal justifications for why I could not do something. I had to take ownership of my actions.

I made a decision to remind myself that I always have the power to change things, to get things right, and to produce the results I want.

Now, when something does not work as I envisioned, the first thought that comes to my mind is about my role in why it did not work. I force myself not to look at external factors. I focus my energy on examining what I did, or did not do, which led to the unwanted result. And my attention moves to what I need to do differently, next time, so I can produce better results.

Are you ready to take 100 per cent responsibility for your results?

The writer is managing consultant and executive leadership coach at EQTD Consulting. He is also the author of the national bestseller "So, You Want To Get Promoted?"

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