

ASSIGNMENTS AND READING MATERIALS FOR MODULE TWO

“Taking Responsibility”
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ASSIGNMENTS

1. I'd like for you to choose one of the stressful situations you have been working on and practice using the five-step process we just went over. So, first, identify the stressful situation you want to work on and write it below.

Now, using the five-step process:

Step 1. Watch a replay of the stressful situation the last time you found yourself “below the line”, as if you are watching a movie, without judgment of yourself or others.

Step 2. Identify your position(s) on the Responsibility Model (i.e., denial, lay blame, make excuses, shame).

Step 3. Ask your heart how you feel about the movie you just watched; describe it below.

Step 4. Create a new movie - an image of what you want to happen; describe it below.

Step 5. Specifically describe how you will take more responsibility for producing the new movie in this situation.

Thank you for doing that activity. I encourage you to repeat it many times a day, whenever you find yourself “below the line”. Eventually, you’ll find that you can go through all five steps very quickly.

READING MATERIAL

Taking Responsibility... The Responsibility Model

The basis for understanding how a person does or does not take responsibility is The Responsibility Model. The model has five levels as shown below:

RESPONSIBILITY	Owning your power and ability to choose and create
SHAME	Laying the blame onto yourself
MAKE EXCUSES	Using excuses for things being the way they are
LAY BLAME	Holding others at fault
DENIAL	Ignoring the problem

A person is “**above the line**” when taking responsibility and “**below the line**” when doing any of the other four. Since individuals who are “above the line” operate from a position of personal power, their ability to achieve their desired result is much greater. This can be seen both in how tasks are accomplished and in the satisfaction a person feels about things.

Questions to Help You Move “Above the Line”

Is anybody “above the line” all the time? Of course not! Even inspirational figures such as Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Gandhi, or the Dalai Lama, who were able to spend a majority of their lives “above the line”, would admit that their thinking and behavior fell “below the line” on occasion. Most individuals go “below the line” initially when experiencing a stressful situation. Our challenge is to notice when we are “below the line” and see if we can let go of the position we are in and move “above the line” and take responsibility. Use the following questions to help increase your awareness of the choices you are making and help you spend more of your time and energy “above the line”.

If in Denial

- How would I view this differently if I thought of it as a problem?

If Laying Blame

- What if it isn't their fault?
- If I refuse to blame someone else, how would I evaluate the situation differently?
- Did I contribute in some way that I don't yet understand?

If Making Excuses

- In spite of all the excuses, how did I end up here?
- If I assume I can create the outcome or choose differently, what other outcome might be possible?

If Shaming

- How can I feel okay about having created or chosen this? (It's not my fault; it was my choice!)
- How would I feel if over time this bad event turned out to be a good event?

For example, if we become aware that we are “below the line” by laying blame on someone else, we ask ourselves if we can let go of the need to blame someone else. We might say to ourselves, “What if it isn’t their fault?” or, “If I refuse to blame someone else, how would I evaluate the situation differently?” If we are able to let go of the position of “laying blame” and find ourselves moving to the position of “making excuses”, then we just notice it and again ask ourselves if we can let go of the need to make excuses. We might ask ourselves, “In spite of the excuses, how did I end up in this situation?” If we find ourselves in the position of shame, again we ask ourselves if we can let go of the need to blame ourselves and move above the line by taking responsibility. Over and over, when we are “below the line” the process is to ask ourselves if we can let go of the position we are in and remind ourselves of our power and ability to choose and create.

To move “above the line” and stay there, we must realize that we can be offended, but not take offense. We learn to respond based on our values, even in stressful situations. As Eleanor Roosevelt said, “No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.” As Gandhi said, “No one can take away your self-respect if you don’t give it to them.” We can learn to take more and more responsibility in our lives - to own our power and ability to choose and create. We can learn that we aren’t always in control of what happens to us, but we are always in control of our response, and that is the ultimate human freedom! It’s not the circumstances in our lives, but our response to the circumstances that is most important.

The Five-Step Process to Help You Move “Above the Line”

Each time you find yourself “below the line”, practice using the five-step process we talked about to help you move “above the line”. As you continue to use this process, you will see that you are able to take more and more responsibility in your life. You will begin to replace your ineffective, and often automatic, patterns of behavior with more effective patterns of behavior.

Remember, each time you find yourself below the line:

- Step 1:** Watch a replay of the stressful situation, as if you are watching a movie, without judgment of yourself or others.
- Step 2:** Identify your position on the Responsibility Model.
- Step 3:** Ask your heart how you feel about the movie you just watched.
- Step 4:** Create a new movie, an image (jigsaw puzzle box top) of what you want to happen, as well as how you want to feel and behave.
- Step 5:** Take responsibility for producing the new movie.

Also, remember that anytime you find yourself complaining, criticizing, comparing, competing, or condemning, whether in relation to others or to yourself, you are probably “below the line”. In that case, you are focusing on all the things you are concerned about, but at the present moment are not in your circle of influence. When you experience yourself as being a light, not a judge; being a model, rather than a critic; part of the solution, rather than part of the problem; being patient, prompt, prepared, polite, productive, and positive, you will notice that you are “above the line”, and focusing within your circle of influence. This experience, however, will require your daily attention and continual use of the five-step process when you fall “below the line”.

Let’s talk briefly about the vision, or ideal movie, you are creating with respect to the stressful situations you have been working on in this class. I suggest that you be very patient with yourself as you create an ideal, yet realistic, image of what you want with respect to each of these stressful situations. For most of us, just asking ourselves questions such as, “What do I want to happen in this situation?”; “What am I needing now?”; “How do I want to feel?”; “How do I want the other person to feel?”; “What’s happening now?”; and “What would be helpful now?” are new experiences. It’s like the witty answering machine recording that says, “Who is this and what do you want?” followed by, “And if you think these are simple questions, most people live their entire life and never answer them.” So, again, be patient with yourself in creating an ideal, yet realistic image that is based on your values and reflects what you want.

There is NO QUICK FIX... The Magic is YOU!!!

Remember, this is a process, and the process takes time. There is no quick fix. I wish I could tell you there’s a magic bullet. We live in a culture that focuses on acute pain and instant relief, yet it’s the chronic conditions and chronic issues in our life that need our attention. We may take a pill to relieve the symptoms of a tight chest, but it doesn’t alter the chronic problems that are causing the tight chest. We might have open-heart surgery to fix several clogged arteries, but unless we make significant life changes, it doesn’t alter the chronic cardiovascular disease throughout our body, and thus, the acute problems will reappear.

Yet, the following analogy is also true: If you have a dirty river, and you stop polluting it, eventually the water will clear, but it takes time. It’s like putting the 500-piece jigsaw puzzle together one piece at a time. And that’s what we are doing in this course with each of your stressful situations. As much as we wish a Fairy Godmother would come along, wave a magic wand and our lives would be just perfect (boy would I like that too!), truth is, we’re our own Fairy Godmother. We know best how to make our wishes come true... but that usually results more from hard work than magic.

Thanks for taking the time to read this. My hope is that you continue your journey towards resilience with Session Three.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Covey, S.R. (1989). *The 7 habits of highly effective people*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Covey, S.R. (2004). *The 8th habit*. New York: Free Press.

Covey, S.R. (1997). *The 7 habits of highly effective families*. New York: Golden Books.

Frankl, V.E. (1984). *Man’s search for meaning*. New York: Simon & Schuster.