



Stop Blaming and Get Results!

September 2007

Volume 6 Issue 9

Blaming is a way of life with humankind, a means to ‘properly’ assign responsibility when things go wrong. In fact it is not at all ‘proper’ because it usually takes several mistakes by a number of people to make things go wrong; so blaming has to be distributed. Even worse, blame leads to escalation of hostilities amongst involved parties and to the ultimate manifestation of human destructiveness, war. In fact blaming violates a very simple human tenet for getting along – respect for others.

1. History

If you are reader of the past series of papers, we turn back to Reference 1 at the end of this paper, *Perversity of Blame*¹, where it was noted that we blame because we think it offers a quick-fix to problems: John is responsible; fix John and we fix the problem. We also use blaming as a means to reinforce our own innocence regarding the matter and hence to cleanse our souls. Blaming others lifts our own egos and self-esteem, which not only needs a lift now and then but also is often too battered to be able to accept blame ourselves – even if it is quite true that the blame should have rested on our shoulders. The paper goes onto say how the focus on blaming others keeps an industry of lawyer busily blaming and busy keeping blame away from their clients. Without blame, perhaps there would be a minimal need for litigation. Finally, the article referred to below suggests why we should not blame, namely:

- Blaming works against arriving at a solution
- The absence of blaming allows a quicker resolution of issues²
- Blaming works against the tenet of defusing emotions³

As a wrap-up the newsletter suggests the removal of blame can only happen in a respectful environment, which segways into the main theme of this paper: blaming is disrespectful.

2. Blaming Is Disrespectful

The main tenet of CCCC and *The Respect Revolution*⁴ is that respect is the fastest, most efficient way to get things done. It engenders a level of human cooperation unmatched by any means. Blame, on the other hand, is the antithesis of respect in that it works against human cooperation like nothing else.

If you are able to accept that respect is a bridge builder to getting things done⁵, then understanding how blame works against respect merits a discussion – the intended purpose of this paper.

3. A Chain of Events is the Base of All Problems

When the newspaper reports a train derailment or an auto crash, the blame is usually heaped on a single individual – drunk engineer or sleeping driver, for example, but rarely is an accident caused by a single incident. For example, an auto accident occurred with me because the chap behind me was not paying attention, so the report said. Yet I know that I contributed by braking too quickly. Had I looked in my rear view mirror, I would have seen how close he was to my

¹ You may obtain a copy of the paper, *Perversity of Blame*, by accessing the CCCC website at www.caswellccc.com.
² Lawyers themselves, recognizing the futility of blaming, are becoming more involved in alternate dispute resolution – namely non-blaming problem solving.
³ See Reference 2.
⁴ See Reference 3.
⁵ As noted in Reference 2, companies who regularly invoke respect as an operating tenet outperform those who do not by a factor of 8:1 on the stock market over the long term.



William E. Caswell

Bill Caswell is an experienced coach of CEOs and senior executives and the author of *The Respect Revolution*, a 12-book series written by a CEO for CEOs as a guide to getting companies to **Excellence**



The Respect Revolution

This 12-volume book series guides a business to **Excellence** and keeps it there.

Get your copy now, available at your local bookstore or at www.respectrevolution.com

Do you have topic ideas? Comments or questions?

**Contact Upkar Bilkhu
CCCC**

190 Bronson Ave. Suite 201
Ottawa, ON K1R 6H4
Tel: (613) 233-0700

Email:
ubilkhuc@caswellccc.com

www.caswellccc.com



tail and been less likely to have quickly made up my mind to make a swift right turn (without signaling – because there wasn't time). A more complex event is often laden with a set of circumstances, not just one. In the Chernobyl nuclear station meltdown, there was a failure to believe the instrumentation when it indicated danger ("The gages must be wrong"), a neglected maintenance procedure and frequent drunkenness, just to name a few maladies in the chain of events. I visited a client just after a fuse in the basement of her house had tripped. The advice she got from a friend was to replace the fuse, which she was busily trying to do. So here was a prescription for disaster. The fuse is the warning that something is wrong, not the cause of the event. Had I not been there, more disaster might have been caused by a series of events. And it is usually that way when disasters that involves human participation, strike. So blaming one event or one person is not dealing with the entire issue.

4. What Blame Does to the Recipient

When a person is blamed, the individual's amygdala, the little emotional gland-pair in the brain, senses that the private territory has been violated and immediately and involuntarily sets up a defensive reaction or strategy. We do not like being blamed and as a defense, we excuse ourselves of culpability even if the event was truly caused by our action or inaction. We feel bad inside; we don't like to be on the blaming end of the stick.

5. How Blame Effects Cooperation

And what do we think of the person who is blaming us? Usually not very much. Do we feel respected by that person? Certainly not! So if that person is trying to obtain our respect (usually driven by the person's need for our cooperation), that individual has just sown the seed for the opposite reaction from us. We do not respect them, we think, often, they are unfair or at least inappropriate in their reaction to the situation and we certainly do not feel like helping them. In fact, if we had a choice, we would distance ourselves as quickly as possible from such bombastic behavior. In a few words: blame works against cooperation. In another few words: blame is disrespectful. Since the key to cooperation and getting things done is respect, by blaming we had just shot ourselves in the foot if we really want to get results with people.

6. A Leader of Non-Blame

Two thousand years ago, the founder of the Christian religion, Jesus Christ, absolved others of blame "Let he who has not sinned, cast the first stone" (against the adulteress), and, "Turn the other cheek", or some such statements. His message carries on to this day but rarely is it practiced by Christian societies since two of the most powerful, the USA and Britain, continue to engage in wars.

7. Doesn't the Idea of Not Blaming Work Counter to the Belief of Assigning Responsibility to Individual?

Assigning responsibility to individuals, if done properly, is based on empowering the person not micromanagement. Because such an approach matches authority and responsibility, it does not seek to blame; it seeks to put the responsibility and the criticism, if any, where it belongs – with each individual. So if blaming takes place at all, it is Kyle, the individual who blames himself, not Kyle's boss. As it happens we are far more critical of ourselves than others would be of us – and it never hurts as much, when we criticize and seek to improve ourselves.

8. Conclusions

- Blaming is best done of ourselves by ourselves. At the very least blame has to be distributed among many people including to ourselves.
- We live in a blaming society and so we have to shake the conventional thinking to progress away from blaming.
- Blaming is disrespectful and leads to lack of cooperation.
- Worse yet, blaming leads to escalation of emotions and the increase of hostilities and misunderstandings.
- If you want to get results, avoid blaming anyone. Simply point out where things should be going and work jointly towards it.

Bill Caswell

References:

1. Caswell, W. E., *Perversity of Blame*, CCCC Newsletter, CCCC Publications, January 2003.
2. Caswell, W. E., *The Climb to Excellence*, General Store Publishing House, Renfrew ON, 2005.
3. Caswell, W. E., *The Respect Revolution*, a 12-volume series, General Store Publishing House, Renfrew ON, 2003-2008.