

## Responsibility

*by Jon Craighead*

*"The price of greatness is responsibility." Winston Churchill*

If you were to ask anyone to define responsibility, it is most likely they would be able to do so quite easily. If you ask that same person if he or she is responsible, the response might require more time because, for many of us, the idea of personal responsibility is not something we are consistently and consciously present to. There are many things in life over which we have very little control, such as who our parents are and our place of birth, for example. However, being a responsible person is something over which we have absolute control.

The dictionary defines responsibility as: the state or position of being a responsible person, or a function for which one is accountable. I would further suggest: an ability or authority to act or decide on one's own, unsupervised.

Responsibility is also delineated as being accountable and answerable for the actions and integrity inside a reportable domain. There are times when we are obligated to be directly responsible, and at other times to perform responsible oversight for others. Each of these roles is substantially important. Being responsible and having people account for themselves and their actions is a profound and personally rewarding experience. Applying this principle through encouragement and support enables developing leaders to pursue excellence in themselves and others. This important dimension solidifies personal responsibility as the ultimate next level of professional duty and honor in the interest of others beyond ourselves.

In the world of business, transactions are built on trust. In doing so we are acting on and obliged to keeping our corporate and individual commitments. This provides a distinct advantage over a more casual relationship that results in uncertainty. Responsibility is not a religious or moral stance. It's neither right nor wrong. It is not better or worse than any other method of operating. However, if your intention is to build a successful enterprise over time, these fundamental operating practices provide a superior level of effectiveness, workability, relatedness and integrity, thus creating an honored and respected business environment. This is the foundation that successful organizations are built on.

Another example of responsibility is defined when one serves as a trustee of an organization. The persistent distinguishing aspect of trusteeship is fiduciary; an ethical responsibility. By definition, trustees are bound by duty and responsibility for the oversight and development of an organization or institution and its people.

Mastery of personal responsibility requires persistence; it is an evolving and ongoing process. Anyone seeking to pursue further inquiry and study into the subject of responsibility will find it covered substantially within many resources on the subject of ethics. Some examples include: Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi and Damon in their book Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet present a dissertation on how to carry out good work responsibly. Robert Solomon covers the same theme in his book, Ethics and Excellence: Cooperation and Integrity in business. Ronald Howard and Clinton Korver, in their book Ethics for the Real World, describe creating a personal responsibility code to guide decision making in work and life inside of operational standards that are legally, prudently, and ethically sound.

Being responsible for our actions and decisions is our choice, and our lives are measured by such choices. That's both good and bad news. Unfortunately, you can't hold anyone else accountable for your decisions. The good news is that being responsible for your life's decisions and actions gives you power in saying who you are and what you stand for – no one else can; this is your sole jurisdiction. This is the dimension of our humanity that distinguishes us as individuals from the throng.

We live in a world that demands the best of each of us; being mindful of this reality provides us the ability to shift from being a victim of circumstances to one of responsibility in saying how things will go. Consequently, each of us is solely accountable for our actions, as well as for our inactions. There are many times in life when we have limited choices. Fortunately, we always have a choice to be responsible. And that, ultimately, is our greatest gift to ourselves.