Do Not Blame the System or Others: Accept Responsibility

By *Harrison Barnes*

Regardless of what's wrong in our lives, most of us spend a good portion of our time blaming others for whatever situation we're in. Every morning for the past several decades I've read the newspaper, and every morning I see numerous stories about criminals, swindlers, and others who've been accused of various bad things. It's typically just the same story over and over again, because the accused person always seems to blame someone else for what's happened.

Regardless of the situation, most people seek to blame others for the issues they face:

- If a large company is going bankrupt and people are losing their jobs, many people will choose to blame the CEO and the Board of Directors.
- If someone loses a job for stealing from his employer, the guilty party may blame the company for not paying him enough, or for "tempting the employee" by making something easy to steal.
- If someone is in a bad relationship, he or she will usually blame the other person for saying this or doing that.

We all seek to place blame and accountability onto others. If we have problems in our careers, we can find scapegoats.

I remember back in the 1980s reading a story about serial killer Ted Bundy coming out to the press just days before his execution, saying he believed he committed his criminal acts because he looked at pornographic magazines. Bundy apparently hoped this "revelation" would absolve him of responsibility for brutally killing countless women. The first words of Dale Carnegie's classic book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, read:

On May 7, 1931, the most sensational manhunt New York City had ever known reached its climax. After weeks of searching, "Two Gun" Crowley was at bay, trapped in his sweetheart's apartment on West End Avenue. One hundred and fifty policemen and detectives laid siege to the top-floor hideaway. They chopped holes in the roof; they tried to smoke out the cop killer with tear gas. Then they mounted their machine guns on surrounding buildings, and for more than an hour, one of New York's fine residential areas reverberated with the crack of pistol fire and the rat-tat-tat of machine guns. Crowley, crouching behind an overstuffed chair, fired incessantly at police. Ten thousand excited people watched the battle. Nothing like it had ever been seen before on the sidewalks of New York.

When Crowley was captured, Police Commissioner E.P. Mulroney declared that the desperado was one of the most dangerous criminals ever encountered in the history of New York. How did Two Gun Crowley regard himself? While the police were firing, Crowley wrote a note; the blood flowing from his wounds left a crimson trail on the paper. It read: "Under my coat is a weary heart, but a kind one—one that would do nobody any harm."

A short time before this, Crowley had been with his girlfriend on a country road on Long Island. A policeman walked up to the car and said: "Let me see your license." Without saying a word, Crowley drew his gun and cut the policeman down with a shower of lead. As the dying officer fell, Crowley leapt out of the car, grabbed the officer's revolver, and fired another bullet into the body.

Crowley was sentenced to the electric chair. When he arrived at the death [house](#) in Sing Sing, he said, "This is what I get for defending myself."

The point of the story is: Two Gun Crowley did not blame himself for anything.

Every single one of us seeks to blame others for the things we don't like about ourselves or our lives, instead of facing the responsibility for our issues. It's much easier for most of us to fix the system and fix others than to fix ourselves.

When most of us have problems we:

- blame the system, and we
- blame individuals.

The system is rarely responsible for our problems. If you go down to Mexico, for example, you can find some of the wealthiest people on earth, who have accomplished their success without selling drugs and by starting companies in a country which is viewed by many as corrupt, impoverished, and third world. In every impoverished country on earth, you will find people who have managed to do great things. The system is what it is and some people are able to make it work for them. You cannot blame the system for where you are in your life. You need to look inward. One of the greatest mistakes many people make is to believe their careers have been controlled by the system. This is not necessarily the case. You're accountable for the things that have happened to you by virtue of the system in which you've chosen to participate. If you didn't see the warning signs and do your homework about the system you're in, then you, too, bear some blame.

In the late 1980s when I was growing up in Detroit, the automotive industry had been closing factories and laying off thousands of workers annually for what seemed like decades. I went to school with the children of many important automobile company executives, and they managed to get jobs for relatives and others they knew working inside auto factories, despite the great number of layoffs that were occurring simultaneously. These were incredible success stories for the people who got the jobs. These were people who may have dropped out of high school and been sitting around at home for a year or more, doing an odd job here or there. Or, they might have been working at very low-paying jobs. Suddenly, they were quietly given factory jobs by an important executive at an auto company like General Motors, and they found themselves making $60,000 to $80,000 a year, almost overnight.

I want to observe at the outset that the ability of people to get jobs like this was absolutely astonishing to me. Just by virtue of knowing someone important, they were able to get incredibly well paying jobs without having any skills. At the same time,

people I know who have gone to good colleges, who have worked hard all their lives, who have developed serious skills-- have never been able to make this much money. In my opinion, the auto companies were paying many people with no skills far, far too much money.

If you're hired under these sorts of conditions, and are doing a relatively simple job making $80,000 a year at the age of 18, you shouldn't expect the sun to shine on you forever. If you lose your job 20 years later, blaming the system might not be fair. Instead, you might take some time to look at the decisions you've made. For example, when you were hired by the factory as they were simultaneously laying people off, you might have surmised you were joining a profession where there might not be a long-term future. Instead of blaming the system, it might be a good idea for you to accept some responsibility for this situation as well. There's nothing wrong with being accountable. Developing a mindset where you're consistently accountable is something that can do you a tremendous amount of good in the long run.

Mortgage finance is another area that gets a lot of systemic blame. A couple of years ago, I saw people in the mortgage industry with no education go from making very little income to earning hundreds of thousands of dollars a year, with very little skills. When the mortgage market crashed, a great number of these people in the mortgage industry suddenly found themselves with very little ability to earn income. In this case, the people who were lending for all of these mortgages might have realized there was little possibility of any long-term future. They were handing out mortgages to people, knowing they couldn't ultimately afford them.

I'm not saying what has happened to many factory workers and people in the mortgage industry isn't unfortunate; however, instead of blaming the system, the people who are currently suffering from these job and income losses need to accept some blame for their current situation. By learning lessons, people can learn to avoid the same situations again.

We also try and blame other individuals for the circumstances we find ourselves in. Just as "the system" is an easy scapegoat for the things we don't like about our lives, ourselves, or the negative situations we face, so too are other individuals. We blame bosses, ex-spouses, co-workers, and others for any number of things. It's true that others can contribute to the negative situations we often face. However, holding others entirely responsible for our condition can serve to disempower us, placing the power over our own lives and conditions into the hands of someone else. We should always believe our lives are under our control and not the control of someone else.

Some of the hardest times in my life were when I was working for bosses and others who I just didn't like. Most people out there have been in similar situations and it's not much fun. I cannot imagine how many people out there might have blamed their "bad bosses" for failed careers and lives of varying levels of disappointment. At times, you or I may feel compelled to do the same.

We then try to *change* that someone or something to fix ourselves. This is among the most common responses we all have to problems. Instead of explicitly addressing our perceptions or ourselves--the primary causes of our afflictions--we immediately move on to blaming others. The problem with this approach is we almost never succeed in changing the other person, place, or thing.

One of the best ways to be happy, enjoy your career, and experience success in your life is to not blame the system or others for the situation you're in and, instead, to accept full responsibility for where you are today. By accepting responsibility, you're much more likely to make better decisions that will lead you to greater success in the future.

THE LESSON

You must accept responsibility for your actions and their consequences, rather than blaming others. The system is rarely responsible for your problems, and much happiness and success will come from accepting full responsibility for your current position. By doing so, you will be much more likely to make better decisions leading to greater future success.