



Why Blame Others?

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"When you blame others, you give up your power to change."

-Robert Anthony

In the beginning of August I completed a Half Ironman in Benton Harbor, Michigan. A Half Ironman is a triathlon that entails swimming 1.2 miles, biking 56 miles and running a half marathon (13.1 miles). Needless to say, this is a challenging race that requires a lot of training and preparation. In addition, it requires a degree of mental toughness to endure its length.

Unfortunately, three days before the race, during an easy four mile run, I severely injured my lower back. At that point I was unsure if I would be able to compete. I rested, iced and sought treatment from a physical therapist before leaving for the race. Despite the pain and subsequent hesitations, I made the decision to compete. In hindsight, I should not have raced because I was eventually diagnosed with a lumbar sprain that required two months of physical therapy; however, it was difficult for me to let go of the training and preparation I had done throughout the previous three months.

The swimming leg of the race was tolerable in spite of my back pain; however, the biking leg was almost unbearable. The position in which I had to station myself on my bike required me to stretch the muscles I had injured. I rode for over three hours in more pain than I had ever experienced in my life and during those three plus hours I had many dark thoughts creep into my mind. These dark thoughts are the crux of this article.

As I struggled through the biking, I began to feel desperate. I was in pain just leaning over my bike; however, every time I rode over a bump or a rocky patch of gravel, a deep and intense jolt of pain would shoot through my lower back and down into my right leg. As biker after biker sped past me, I tried to position myself in different ways on my bike but nothing helped. My desperation quickly grew into anger which fueled a series of dysfunctional thoughts about blaming others for the predicament I was in. My boyfriend was competing in the race as well and I remember becoming very angry with him. I thought if he hadn't suggested we do this race then I wouldn't be in so much pain, and I was jealous that somewhere along the course he was probably enjoying himself a lot more than I was. In addition, I remember thinking about my parents, who have supported me in all of my activities, and being really angry with them for not successfully convincing me to not compete.

At some point in the midst of my pain and anger, I climbed off my bike to straighten my back and stretch my legs. It was in this moment I realized I was blaming those I cared about for the predicament I was in when it had nothing to do with them. The only reason I was in this situation was because of a stubborn decision I made. No one forced me to enter the race after I hurt my back, and no one was forcing me to stay on my bike. It was unfortunate and unfair that I hurt my back but it certainly wasn't my boyfriend's or my parents' fault. My desperation was fueled by pain and my anger was brought on by the misfortune of my injury, which tempted me to seek an external explanation for my struggle. At this point in the race, I was more than halfway through the biking and after realizing that I needed to take responsibility for the predicament I was in, I decided to periodically take breaks from riding to help alleviate my back pain. I believed if I could make it through the rest of the biking that the running leg would be tolerable given that I could straighten my back. With this shift in thinking, I was able to finish the entire race in about six hours and 20 minutes.

The story of my dysfunctional thoughts can be applied to the workplace. It is likely that either you or a colleague has made a mistake or bad decision at work. How did you feel? What did you do? In these moments it is common to feel desperate and this desperation can sometimes lead an individual to, consciously or unconsciously, put the blame on others in order to alleviate negative feelings towards one's self. It can be difficult admitting a problem is your fault. However, displacing blame negatively affects relationships and prevents one from looking realistically at the current situation and his/her involvement. Taking responsibility for your own decisions and actions will not only foster your relationships but it will also help you to tackle problems quickly and appropriately.

During the first half of the biking leg of the Half Ironman, I was desperate and angry and not thinking realistically about the situation. It was not until I took responsibility for my decision to compete, rather than placing blame on others, that I was able to decrease my negative feelings and problem-solve more effectively in order to finish the race.