

**FROM BLAME TO RESPONSIBILITY—  
THE KEY TO POWER AND EMPOWERMENT**

**BY ED MORLER, M.B.A., PH.D.**

(Excerpt from *THE LEADERSHIP INTEGRITY CHALLENGE*)

*We should every night call ourselves to an account. Our vices will abate of themselves if they are brought every day to the shaft.*

—Lucius Annaeus Seneca

A powerful exercise is to look at what and how we blame. The faults we find in others are often indicators of what we need to look at in ourselves. If we are willing, we can use what we are upset about as a reflection to help us identify and own some aspect of ourselves that we are denying or have not recognized before.

We are responsible for our impact. Others are responsible for their impact. The more of our impact we recognize and take responsibility for, the more empowered we become. When we realize we are blaming and/or defending (symptoms of an unwillingness to confront something), we need to find and own what responsibility we've been avoiding and/or denying. If we are willing to use what upsets us as a mirror to look deeper and to take more responsibility for our impact, we open the door to expanded awareness, growth and empowerment.

We need to recognize and own our piece of a situation—no more, no less. *Denying any of our*



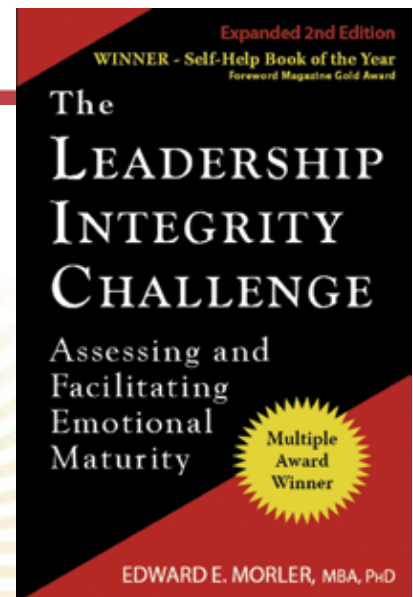
*impact, no matter how large or small, positive or negative, is disempowering to ourselves. Our willingness to observe, confront and own our part is where the opportunities for growth, maturity and personal empowerment lie.*

*Facing it, always facing it, that's the way to get through. Face it.* —Joseph Conrad

**THE GULP STAGE**

If we are upset and are, in effect, judging what some person did or did not do, we need to ask how we have done some form of that ourselves. There is something of a similar nature, or mirror image, that we have not recognized or owned before. When we are misemotional about someone else's behavior, inevitably we are hiding something from ourselves. For example, if we find ourselves feeling upset with and blaming someone because he or she did not follow through as promised, it is an opportunity to look closer at how we have not been fully responsible for our own promised or implied follow-through. This is often the "gulp" stage, for it is here that we finally recognize how irresponsible we have been.

*What isn't part of ourselves doesn't disturb us.*  
—Herman Hess



It may very well be true that another person was irresponsible and didn't deliver as promised—and that may need to be dealt with—but *the opportunity and the empowering aspect is our increased willingness to recognize and take more ownership of the impact of our own behavior.*

When we shift our attention from how the other person is upsetting us (placing responsibility out there) to how we are doing something similar and have been denying it (placing responsibility within), three things immediately occur:

1. We are less upset (our attention has shifted from blame to being more responsible)
2. We have more positive control—we shifted our focus and intention from where we had little control (the other person) to where we have greater control (ourselves)
3. We feel lighter and more empowered (the inevitable result of taking increased responsibility for our own behavior)

Going deeper is an opportunity not only to observe an aspect of our impact for which we have not been taking responsibility, but also to recognize *the pattern* of how we have been irresponsible—of how we keep hidden from ourselves our real power and greatness. Only when able and willing to recognize and own that pattern can we drop the victim attitude. Only then are we willing to be personally responsible, own our inherent power, expand our options and choices and empower ourselves to manifest constructive change.

The elegance of this process is that it is not dependent on the rightness or wrongness of either party. It is dependent solely on our willingness to observe and take responsibility for our own part in creating or allowing the upsetting situation to occur.

*When you see a man of the highest caliber, give thought to obtaining his stature. When you see one who is not, go home and conduct a self-examination. —Confucius*

*He who has so little knowledge of human nature as to seek happiness by changing anything other than his own disposition will waste his life in fruitless efforts and multiply the grief he intends to remove.*

—Samuel Johnson

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr. Morler is president of Morler International, a management training and development firm specializing

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