

Counselor's Corner

Let Us Be Instruments of Peace

Well, the elections are over. Whether we agree on the President-elect or not, we all seem to be relieved that the campaigning is done. For months, the focus seems to have been on name-calling and digging up dirt on candidates and their families. This was uncomfortable, because neither of the major candidates nor their staunch supporters seemed to show much ownership of their mistakes. Everyone wanted to play the blame game.

At times, blame is warranted. In cases of robbery, property damage, traffic accidents, physical harm and assaults, a perpetrator must be identified and brought to justice. Although that does not always happen in our imperfect world, observation and scientific methods are used to try to identify those responsible. Many very bad people have been dissuaded from repeating their crimes because of fines, restraining orders, or jail sentences.

Assigning blame is not always a good practice, especially when it comes to matters that are not measureable. Therapist Elliot D. Cohen Ph.D feels that people often want to figure out who is at fault other than one's self. Admitting one has made a mistake is not easy. He says that people participate in blaming games, because "it seems people believe they are less of a person for failing and hence not worthy of respect." How ironic, because none of us are without flaws. Maybe a better approach is to admit our part in a negative situation, and treat our failures as opportunities to learn and forgive ourselves and others.

In an educational setting, there is an emphasis on grades and conduct. Students make mistakes. They may not finish an assignment, pass a test, or act courteously. Although it is very logical that a student is probably not going to do well if he/she does not complete homework assignments, pay attention in class, or study, we find that students sometimes will not take responsibility for what they have done or failed to do. Sometimes students try to wiggle out of things by saying that others were doing the same and did not get caught. That is not ownership. It is putting blame on a teacher. This is not a good choice, because the student will not learn from a mistake. Further, lots of ripples can be created when parents buy into these excuses. So, the bottom line for students is to accept that they are not perfect, have done something that is wrong, and learn not to do it again.

Few of us are exempt from participating in the blame game. At times, it is easier to blame the boss, the employees we guide, and the students we teach than look at ourselves in a mirror. Personal and familial relationships can be jeopardized, and we can resort to disowning children, parents, other relatives, spouses, and friends when we proclaim blamelessness and close off communication. Those who continuously point fingers often will establish a pattern of losses. Those who blame seem to think there is only one way, their way. They are rigid, unrealistic, lack any kind of self-scrutiny, or empathy. They pass judgment on others while they fail to recognize their own clay feet. Jobs, marriages and other relationships will continue to fail when blame is always one sided.

In a recent blog, the topic of dealing with blamers was raised. Many commented that blamers need to review, reflect, and acknowledge their part of a problem. If not, some felt that the blamer becomes an unleashed narcissist who tries to claim power and control over all. When one is faced with a blamer who does not change, the answer may be therapy or disassociation. In other words, steering clear might be the answer! In an article called "No Nonsense Self-Defense," the authors feel that those playing the blame game will go any distance to "protect their core beliefs" and are "dedicated to protecting these beliefs at all costs" to themselves and others.

Some key people felt shock and bitter disappointment with the election results. However, they took the opportunity to publicly congratulate the winner, put blame aside, and express their willingness to work together for the good of the nation. Our family and friends deserve to be treated with this same respect whether we agree with them or not. We may be disappointed with the actions of others at times, but we best remind ourselves that we are all human and will disappoint, too. None of us are entitled to throw stones, hate, or create great divides.

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