

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

My boss refuses to take responsibility for anything. When something goes wrong, he immediately blames it on everyone else (usually me). Everyone is aware that some of our biggest business failures were a result of his decisions, but he always has an excuse about why we bombed and it's always because of someone or something else. He screams at me (and everyone else), and he is driving us crazy! -- Louis

Dear Louis,

The failure to take personal responsibility seems to be the scourge of our times. Too many people – and your boss sounds like he is high among them – refuse to accept the mantle of leadership and recognize that, “the buck stops here.” With that kind of attitude, it’s very clear that your boss doesn’t have what it takes to be much of a leader in your organization. The great humanitarian Albert Schweitzer once said, “Man must cease attributing his problems to his environment, and learn again to exercise his will – his personal responsibility.” It doesn’t sound like your boss is inclined to believe Schweitzer’s wise advice.

Some people find it much easier to look outward – to the environment, to other people, to circumstances, to external events – instead of honestly reflecting on how they might have done things differently. When we have the courage to directly and gently take responsibility for our decisions, we learn from our mistakes and can move forward in business – and in life -- with self-love and new wisdom. But this requires at least a modicum of self-esteem, and a willingness to look inside and take responsibility instead of casting blame on others.

Your boss doesn’t understand that blaming is a waste of time; it accomplishes nothing. I remember an old adage about the folly of blaming others for our own failures: “If you could kick the person in the pants who was responsible for most of your troubles, you wouldn’t sit down for a month.” Ouch! (Can your boss sit down, or does he stand at his desk?!). What’s worse is that he’s using his position of authority to treat you and other staff members unprofessionally and inappropriately.

Learning to take personal responsibility for decisions is your boss’s issue, and there is not much you can do to make him become more conscious of the source of his bad business choices. But you can take care of yourself. And you must.

It can be challenging to confront a boss or someone in authority, but your confidence level will grow by leaps and bounds if you refuse to be a dumping ground for his blaming. He has no right to scream at you, and you cannot allow anyone – read that *anyone* – to treat you disrespectfully. You will have to stand up for yourself. Calmly, assertively, and clearly, let him know that you will no longer stand for his screaming at you. It is inappropriate, cruel, and uncalled for. Be firm. Look him right in the eye and tell him in an uncompromising voice that you will simply not be treated this way. If his behavior does not change, I suggest you go over his head to his supervisor and let him/her know how he is managing your department. Have specific details that support

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your case. It can be even more powerful if there are others on the staff who can corroborate your experience. That way, the big mucky muck will know that yours is not an isolated problem, but rather, that your boss is out of control and needs to get some help. Perhaps he/she will see that your boss may need to be removed from his responsibilities until he can treat his staff with respect and shoulder the responsibility that leadership demands.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2003 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) www.fullpotentialliving.com