



RECONSIDER THE “REASONS” FOR YOUR BEHAVIORS

Many people find it easier to accept themselves when they know *why* they behave the way they do. They look for explanations that might relieve their guilt or justify their anger. These people might say that they act the way they do because of the following:

Their parents made them do it.

Their parents didn't make them do it.

Their heredity made them do it.

Their heredity made them unable to do it.

Somebody else made them do it.

Nobody made them do it.

It's a habit.

It's not a habit.

They're not morning people.

They're not evening people.

It's what they learned when they were children.

The weather was just too terrible.

The moon was full last night.

These are just a few examples of the reasons that people give for their behavior. And there's a problem with each item on the list: Even when people settle on a *reason* for their behavior, that doesn't necessarily help them *change* the behavior.

When considering ways to be more successful, many people begin by analyzing their circumstances and searching for causes. They operate on a particular assumption—that until they know the reasons for their behaviors, it's impossible to change those behaviors.

Consider a different point of view: If we want to take responsibility for our lives, we might be more successful if we stop the search for causes. If we're poor, lonely, or depressed, we can just cross off all our reasons for being that way.

In using the principle of cause and effect to analyze our behavior, we can easily fool ourselves. Human beings are complex creatures, and life is complicated. When we consider all the variables at work in our lives, it's less clear that there is any one cause or group of causes that fully explains anything we do.

There's another problem. Even if we *could* figure out all the reasons for our behavior, we'd still be left with the same results in life. Even if we could talk with more sophistication about the causes of our misery, we might still be miserable.

When determining what we want in life and choosing ways to get it, we have a basic choice. We can trust our desires and look for ways to fulfill them. Or we can make a long list of reasons why we *haven't* fulfilled those desires. Sometimes creating "good" reasons for not creating the life of our dreams helps us tolerate the fact that we don't actually have what we want.

This does not mean we should throw the idea of cause and effect out the window. Thinking in terms of cause and effect provides a useful tool in making sense of our experience. But when we view cause and effect as the ultimate, all-purpose tool, we can get into trouble.

"Take responsibility" suggests that we minimize or avoid talking about cause and effect. Instead of asking *Why do I do that?* we can ask *How do I do that?* Instead of generating excuses, we can examine our current behaviors. Instead of searching for causes, we can take action. We can adopt new behaviors without knowing the reasons for our old behaviors.

So feel free to come up with a reason for doing the things you do—if that helps. And afterward, consider asking yourself this question: *What can I start doing differently right now?*

You might get so busy and so successful at creating new results in your life that you won't have time to consider the reasons for your behavior anymore.