

The Dog Ate My Homework

Personal Responsibility and How to Avoid It

When my children were young, I was given a great piece of advice: *Don't ask why.*

As parents, our first instinct when a tot misbehaves is to say, “Why did you _____?!” (...hit your brother? ...write on the wall? ...eat the cookie when I told you not to?) Then as they get older we start questioning why they *didn't* do something—take out the trash, finish your homework, get home by curfew.

The first time you ask a two-year old *why*, you will most likely get a blank stare, but if you ask the question often enough, the child will quickly learn to invent reasons to justify what he did, and, in his eyes, make it OK.

Wise parents use these instances to teach the child to take ownership and responsibility for his actions. But the parent who allows the child to get off the hook with lame excuses reinforces the behavior pattern, and inadvertently trains the child to dodge fault, avoid disapproval, and skip consequences.

Having read to this point, you may be asking *why* you are getting child-rearing tips in this month's MasterThoughts. Well ... little tots grow up to be adults. And far too many adults have never outgrown the game of “it's not my fault.”

The funny thing is that blame-shifters honestly think they are fooling people, but they aren't. They are frustrating to manage, unproductive, and untrustworthy because they refuse to own their actions and honor their commitments. Because they are always playing the victim card, they can't be believed or relied upon. Their bosses are sorry they hired them; their co-workers are tired of taking up the slack.

Now before you start pointing fingers, do a little self-searching. None of us are exempt from the temptation to squirm out of accountability. But in each situation, we have two choices: we can play the blame game, or we can be honest and come clean. Trust me, when you take the high road you'll feel better about yourself, and so will everyone else!



(As I was writing this, Jim Carrey's movie, “Liar, Liar” came to mind. If you want a good laugh and a very exaggerated illustration of my point, it's well worth your watch.)



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