Take Responsibility

The ninth tool is take responsibility, words that we have heard all of our lives. Two definitions I found on the internet were “ a duty or obligation to satisfactory perform or complete a task that one must fulfill and which has a consequent penalty for failure” or “owning your ability and power to create, choose and attract.” As we consider the full application of each of these definitions, there can be very different results in how each of us addresses responsibility in our lives.

Let’s look at the first definition. As soon as each of us begins to understand words, we are told to be or take responsibility. We are told that we are big girls or boys and can feed ourselves, use the toilet, dress, etc. We feel proud and want to do more on our own. Through childhood and early adolescence we continue to add to what we can do, but at some point we begin to question whether we want to add to our list what others want us or we find that we cannot do what is being asked. We will refuse to do something or not do it correctly, and we will have adults filling us with the dreadful consequences of our lack of responsibility.

In both instances we feel guilt. Somehow we have to get rid of this feeling. A way to do that is to blame, to find fault. We may blame ourselves, we decide that there is something wrong with us. This belief will only lead to us feeling that there is more and more wrong with us. This, of course, can lead to a whole array of negative consequences. On the other hand we may want to get rid of this negative feeling. We blame someone or something else. We are hoping to not suffer the consequences of not being responsible. Here too we will have negative results.

The fault in this definition is that the high expectation that we are able to accept any responsibility is unrealistic. While we know that all humans are imperfect, with responsibility, perfection is asked and expected. No one can ever meet the standard which results is negative behavior or communication with others.

Now the second definition seems to begin with the premise that each of us is unique and has a variety of talents, skills and abilities. Of course our introduction to responsibility is much the same. Our parents begin to let us take care of our basic needs as we are capable of handling and we want to do more. Then along with all these basic skills we are encouraged to develop our own special skills. In discovering our own uniqueness, we begin to understand our own personal power. We can take responsibility to act in the world.

There is not the same penalty luring in front of us if we do not take responsibility in some areas or having difficulties in a responsible situation. Yes, we will feel some initial guilt in these situations and may consider blaming, quitting, justifying, or denial, but we can more comfortably respond in a responsible manner. We know ourselves and what we can and cannot do and can face ourselves. With our dignity in tact we can admit that this is not an area of our ability, we did not accept this task, or we realize that we did not handle this situation as well as needed. We can learn, correct and improve.

With this definition we are ready and able to take responsibility for communicating civilly. First our humanness is universal. We all are imperfect. This eliminates the fear of appearing less equal than the other. We can admit our lack of an ability and expect to be understood for acknowledging who we are. Secondly, we have had our lifetime of experiencing more civil communication as we have been helped to learn our abilities and power to choose. Lastly, we know that we can continue to learn and practice civil discourse. We can take the responsibility to use the other eight tools whenever we communicate with someone.

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