

## The Next Step is My Responsibility

Whatever situation we find ourselves in, whether organisational strife, a need to change our own circumstances, estranged children, meeting the consequences of previous action or any number of other possibilities, the next step is, in my world, my responsibility, and in your world, yours. That may seem sweeping and bold as a statement. It is. If it is not your responsibility to create the difference needed in your world, whose responsibility is it?

If I am in conflict with my partner, and I don't take responsibility to take some positive action, at least attempt something towards a reconciliation, the message is "Darling, I don't care and it is your responsibility." If I am in a work environment and observe an injustice, and choose to do nothing, in the inaction I am saying, "I accept and support this form of injustice." If something I value is being eroded, and I do nothing, I am declaring "I don't really value this thing."

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### Abstract

*I am responsible for my actions, thoughts, feelings, and for taking appropriate action to protect what I value. Inaction, when values are threatened, is equivalent to supporting their loss.*

### Keywords

Act, decision-making, personal power, self-responsibility, values

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*Whatever my next step, I am responsible for taking it.*

People who do pursue their passion and seek to correct something they see as out of whack are often labelled “Activists”. For those who are not engaged in their passion, the activist can be a real challenge to things as they are. None of us can possibly pursue every cause, right every wrong, or address every injustice. Bring any two of us together and we won’t agree across the board on what matters and how the issues ought to be addressed. Hence a variety of political parties, religions, nations, cultures, clubs and so on.

Yet, if we do nothing, sit back because we are busy or someone else can do it better, or for any other reason we concoct, we are saying “What is occurring is okay.” Creeping Normality, otherwise known as Death by a Thousand Cuts, highlights how inaction over an intrusion into what we value leads to greater acceptance of greater wrong, until our world has changed and the new normal is massively out of step, and we feel powerless to intervene. The often cited, usually as a poem, speech by Pastor Martin Niemöller (1892–1984), “First they came ...” speaks of inaction as first one group is taken, then another, with no intervention, until they come for “me”. Oops.

*First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—  
Because I was not a Socialist.*

*Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out—  
Because I was not a Trade Unionist.*

*Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—  
Because I was not a Jew.*

*Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.*

Global warming, genocide, war crimes, pollution, racism or any other –ism, political and business corruption, and a host of other intrusions into what some people value are classic examples of Creeping Normality. It occurs within organisations as well when a person imposes their values on others and remains unchallenged. It is easy for those with authority within a system to assume that they speak for the whole, or that they know best. Status is a great opiate. Many “leaders” choose to reach decisions in isolation. It is a difficult and courageous act of leadership to engage with and hear the voices of subordinates or others impacted by decisions. You may still have to make the hard call. Doing so while engaged with those affected, understanding and appreciating the values of those impacted, enables heart as well as

head to be engaged in the decision. Conversely, it takes great courage to raise one’s voice and speak out against processes and decisions that appear inappropriate, especially if also seeking to maintain open and constructive dialogue. It is not unusual for those fearful of opposition to silence objections.

As with all things, balance matters. If every idea raised were to be shot down by someone else, we would have anarchy, and little chance of progress. When there is no ability to voice concern, we have a dictatorship. Somewhere in the middle is a place where ideas and counterarguments can be voiced and respected. That is a difficult and valuable place to reach and maintain. That requires willingness and commitment of all involved.

We are responsible for how we feel, what we think, what we say, the actions we take, and the behaviours we exhibit. We are also responsible to others to let them know how we feel, what we think, how they are impacting us, and what we need. After all is said and done, in any situation, we are each individually responsible for what and how we contribute to the results that are achieved.

- Are there situations, issues or challenges that threaten your values?
- How might you contribute to creating outcomes that reflect your values?
- Do you value and respect the rights of others to justice and fairness? If so, what are you doing or could you do to ensure the voices of impacted individuals and groups are heard and considered?
- How can you balance expedient decision-making and action with understanding and consideration of relevant issues and concerns of others?
- If you choose to bypass or minimise opposition or counterarguments, what is your motivation?
- Are you functioning from a place of personal power or reacting to fear

***For more information related to themes in this article, refer to chapter 3 (Pivotal Life Concepts) of:*** Harrison, S. G. (2012). *Appreciate the Fog: Embrace Change with Power and Purpose*. Auckland, New Zealand: Xlibris Corporation.

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