

BLAME in RELATIONSHIPS

By Marlene Neufeld

In my last article, I explored the relationship between creativity and blame in relationships. When creativity is missing in relationships, the result is often blame. Blame is one of the most harmful things that occurs in any relationship. It stops the flow of love and affection. We either blame others, or ourselves. Both are equally detrimental to the relationship.

What is blame? My computer's thesaurus lists the following words as synonyms of blame: guilt, culpability, fault, censure, accuse, point the finger at, hold accountable, impugn, reproach, condemn, criticize, think badly of, upbraid, reprimand. Blame is based on the assumption that someone is at fault, that someone is right and someone else is wrong. Blame is seeing yourself or someone else as needing to improve and/or change. Blame is something that is assigned. It is based on inequality, on someone having less power/control than the other person. It is based on the belief that someone is doing something to you, that you have no control. Blame is focused on the past, on finding out what went wrong rather than the present or on what can be done.

Blaming triggers a burst of adrenalin. The next time you have a blaming thought or make a blaming statement, notice the edgy feeling of excitement and anger, almost glee. That is why we blame; we're addicted to the burst of adrenalin. We mistake the edgy feeling of adrenalin for aliveness and connection. However, adrenalin doesn't create long-lasting connection, it quickly dissipates and then we feel drained. We need to learn to generate connection and vitality through creativity rather than an adrenalin rush.

Blame is driven by fear. It is based on the fear that without blame we (or the other person) won't improve, grow, change. We believe that unless we assign blame nothing will get better. Our whole society is based on this – we strive to discover who is to blame so we can fix it. My teachers say, “we have high goals for ourselves and our loved ones, and we fear that without a constant barrage of criticism and blame we would all languish in mud puddles of sloth” Drs. Gay & Kathlyn Hendricks, *Lasting Love*, p. 85. We're afraid that without blame we (or they) won't take responsibility for our/their lives; we're trying to get ourselves (or someone else) to take responsibility for something we're (or they're) unwilling to own.

However, instead of motivating people, blame keeps people stuck. It keeps us locked in not being response-able, not being able to respond. Many people see the words blame and responsibility as synonymous but I believe that blame disowns real responsibility. I have never known an instance where blame caused positive long term growth.

The opposite of blame: I am learning that the opposite of blame is “Radical Response-ability”. Drs. Hendricks use this term for being able to respond creatively even though it looks like the other person is in control or has the power. Radical response-ability means letting go of who's right and wrong. Radical response-ability includes wonder and creativity. It is something we do, something we claim, an action we take, not something that can be assigned. The focus is on what I can do now to create the outcome I want.

Consider the following possibility: Every sentence you speak is based on one of two intentions:

1. Wonder, creativity, discovery, learning, connecting OR
2. Attacking, defending, making someone right and someone else wrong, justifying your position.

Try an experiment, notice which intention you are speaking from. Notice that you can choose to speak from a different intention. If you choose the first intention, you are taking steps to build your relationship.

How to get out of blame: Here are some suggestions for getting out of blame and claiming full healthy response-ability.

1. Shift your body posture. Make a radical change in your posture. Focus especially on opening your posture in some way. As you do that, take some relaxed belly breaths that create a sense of flow in your body.
2. Generate wonder; create a pleasurable “hmmmmmmmmmm” tone that lasts through your entire out breath. Explore different pitches and different places in your chest and throat to create your best-feeling hum.

While humming, use your arm to make a big circling gesture to your heart as if you were tracing the outside of a wheel. Circle and hum two or three times while wondering:

- “What can I learn from this?” or
 - “How am I creating this?” or
 - “If this issue were resolved, what would I be doing with all this energy?”
3. Say something “unarguable”; i.e. what are my body sensations, what am I feeling?

In our couples coaching we invite people to make a commitment to generating wonder and creativity rather than blame in all their interactions. My husband, Bob, and I have found that in doing so we have discovered new joy and peace in our relationship.

This is the third in a series of articles about conscious living and loving by Marlene Neufeld, MSW, RSW, owner of Creative Transformations. Marlene is a body-centered transformational coach. She specializes with her partner Bob in “2 on 2 couples coaching” and in experiential group playshops. For more on the work of Marlene and Bob see www.marleneandbob.com.