

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Worksheet for Deep Dive | How to Stop Blaming Other People (Episode 181)

The instinct to blame is a toxic pattern. It deprives us of our agency, weakens our relationships, causes dysfunction in our workplaces, and creates inertia across our lives. We need to see blame for what it is, and we need a new way to reframe it so that we can better understand how and when to appropriately take responsibility in our dynamics.

[In this episode](#), we dive deep with Gabriel Mizrahi to examine how we fall into the pattern of blaming other people for our own mistakes and, just as often, take ownership of problems that are really bigger than our sphere of control. We'll see what it takes to operate with true accountability and set a tone, standard, and operating procedure for navigating life's challenges.

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The Accountability Spectrum

We can think of internalization and externalization as two ends of a spectrum.

On one end of the spectrum, we take on too much ownership of those experiences, and attribute all responsibility for them to ourselves. This is self-blaming — total internalization.

On the other end of the spectrum, we refuse to take ownership of our negative experiences, and instead project them outward. This is other-blaming — total externalization.

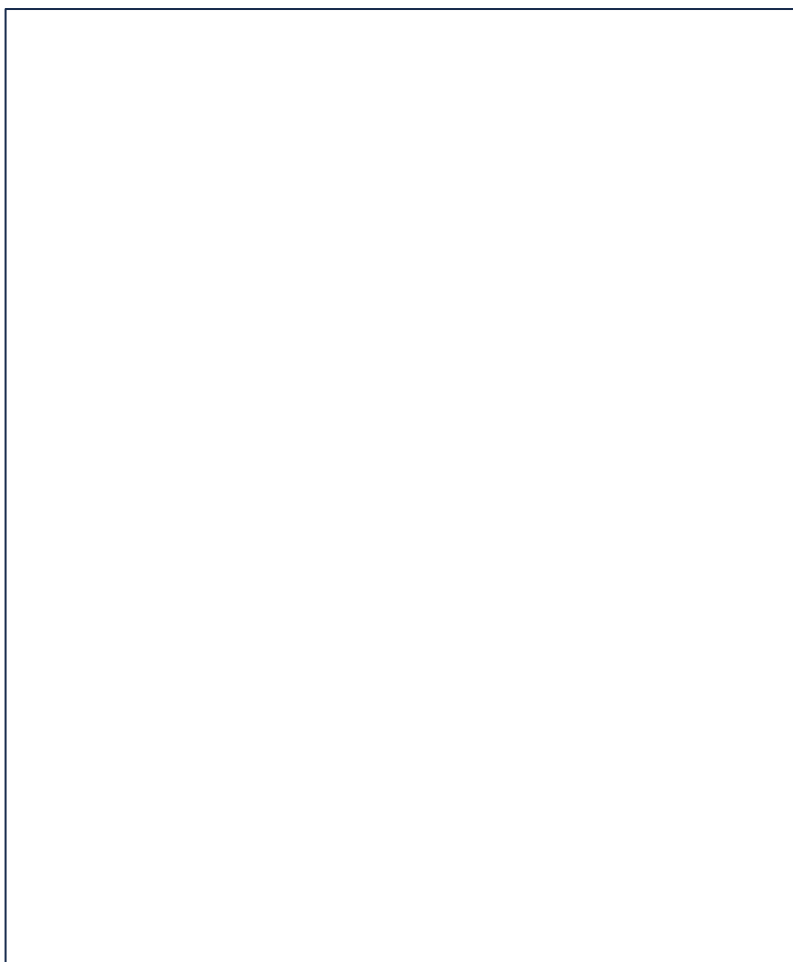
In the middle is a healthy synthesis of these impulses: an appropriate recognition of other people's responsibility and a healthy ownership of our own.

Let's call that middle ground accountability.

What does it mean to be accountable? In short, it means honestly understanding the role we play in the way life happens, and not taking on any more or less responsibility than we should.

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Consider situations in which you've either blamed someone else for something you've had the power to correct, or taken the blame for something truly beyond your control. Now frame these situations within the Accountability Spectrum and determine where your responsibility falls.

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Tame the Blame

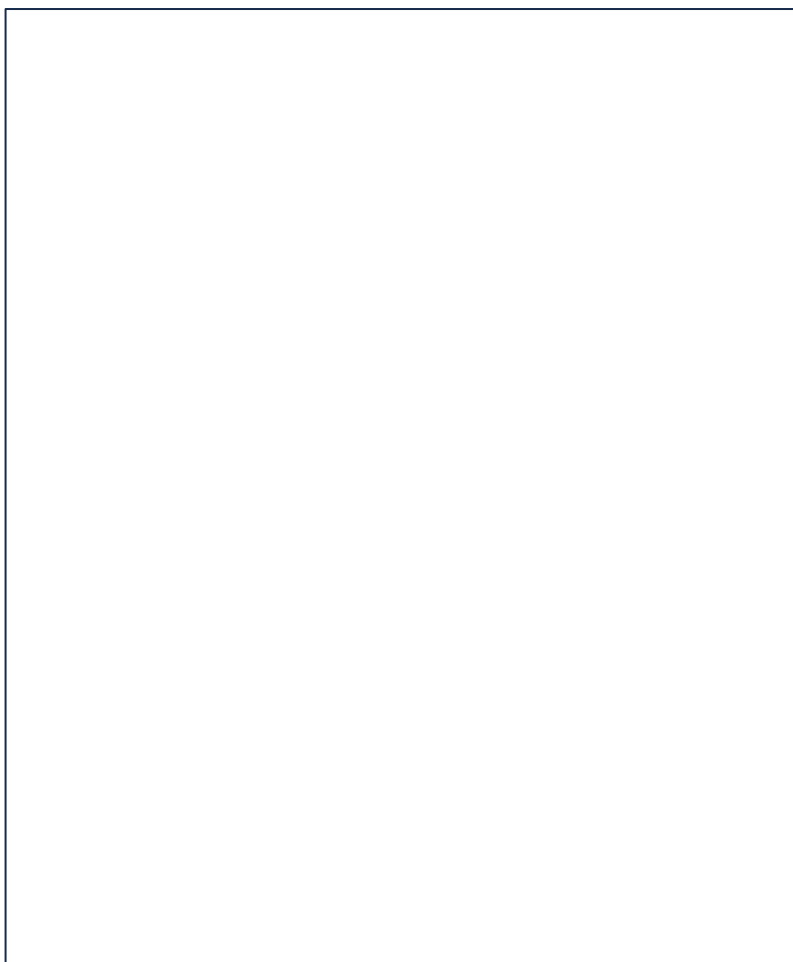
Blaming is a very clever coping mechanism for psychological pain. If you're anxious, frustrated, or angry, it's not irrational to not want to deal with it. But blaming can take a number of different forms that fulfill other functions of which we're usually not even aware.

"In a single day, you can wake up and blame the city for traffic on the way to work," says Gabriel. "You can blame your colleagues for not making the next pot of coffee. You can blame your boss for making you stay past 7."

But consider this: If you know the traffic's bad in your city, *you* can take it upon yourself to leave a little earlier so you're on time for work. If you know the pot of coffee is nearly empty, *you* can make the next pot. If your boss is making you stay late, maybe it's because *you* were late to work -- which goes back to the traffic situation.

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The first key to stop blaming is self-awareness. Think of the most common points of blame that go on in your day-to-day life. Write them down below and, for each one, list ways you have the power to turn them around and avoid problems in the first place.

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Replace Blame with Understanding

Externalizing in any given situation depends on an inaccurate understanding of responsibility.

When we blame someone else, we attribute more responsibility to them than they actually have. When we internalize that blame, we attribute more responsibility to ourselves than we actually should. When we correctly apportion responsibility between ourselves and the other party, then we achieve true accountability.


To do that, we have to replace the impulse to blame with the commitment to understand. Only by choosing to understand can we get an accurate view of all of the factors at play in a negative situation.

Ask yourself the following questions; they're useful for getting a handle on how responsibility for a situation shakes out:

- **What specifically is the negative situation taking place? How is it showing up in this moment?**
- **How did we arrive at this situation? What events, decisions or factors led to this moment?**
- **Who else is involved in the situation? What are their roles and responsibilities?**

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- **What is my role and responsibility in this situation?**
- **Which external factors (not under anybody's direct control) played a role in the situation? (e.g., weather, office policy, tangential conflicts, rough days, laws, etc.)**
- **What questions can I ask of myself and the other party to better understand the situation? What do I need to know to correctly understand who's accountable here? What do I not know about this situation?**
- **How did all of these factors -- events, decisions (or non-decisions), personalities, conflicts, environment, etc. -- interact to lead to the negative situation at hand?**



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Take Appropriate Ownership

The best antidote to blaming is empathy.

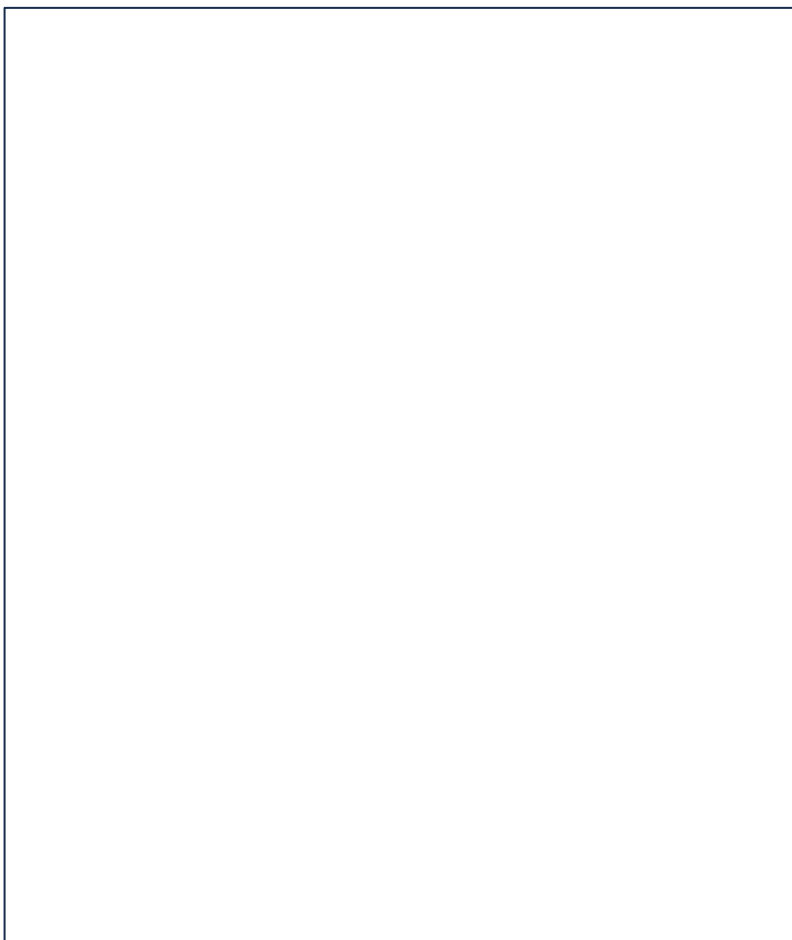
Empathy, of course, is the ability to understand and share the experience of another person. But more broadly, it's the willingness to step outside of ourselves, stop taking things personally, and appreciate a situation from all perspectives.

Once you study a situation honestly, you'll be in a position to appreciate all of the factors at play. Those factors include what you did, what the other party did, the connections between those decisions, larger situational variables, personal histories and personalities, and so on. With all of those cards on the table, you can choose to pick up the ones that are truly yours.

When you take responsibility for the role you played in an event, notice the tendency to slip back into internalization. The more self-aware you become — and the more you discover the power of accountability — the more tempting it can be to take on more and more responsibility in your life. What starts as healthy accountability can subtly slip into toxic internalization. That's a pitfall we have to consciously work to avoid by constantly checking in with ourselves.

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Using the language of understanding over blame, consider how you might take ownership of a problem -- in part or in whole -- appropriately. Remember: Your goal is accountability, not self-punishment. Taking ownership of a problem you truly don't control won't get anyone closer to solving the problem.

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Make Accountability a Habit

Over time, you can make accountability a habit. You can consciously cultivate it in a way that becomes second nature, until the instinct to take ownership of your actions becomes just as strong — hopefully even stronger — than the impulse to blame.

- **Lead by example:** Committing to accountability in your own life first, and model what accountability looks like for the people around you.
- **Create a practice:** Take stock of all of the instances of blaming that came up in a certain period, and reflect on how you could have operated differently.
- **Institutionalize:** Make accountability a way of doing business — and combine it with the methods above — to create a culture of accountability.

Accountability breeds more accountability, and helps us access the trust and agency that we miss whenever we indulge the impulse to blame, rather than owning the part we play in our own lives.

Full show notes and resources for this episode [can be found here.](#)

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About



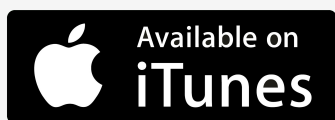
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We deconstruct the playbooks of the most successful people on earth — and learn new strategies, perspectives, and insights you can't find anywhere else. Then, take these valuable insights into your own life and live what you listen.

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support@jordanharbinger.com

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