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CAUSING  
OTHERS  
TO WANT  
YOUR  
LEADERSHIP

*...for Administrators*  
*2nd edition*

ROBERT L. DEBRUYN

AUTHOR OF THE MASTER TEACHER

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## **THE LAW OF BLAME**

*Rationale: If you try to pass the blame to those being led—even if it is fully deserved—they may not accept any of it. On the other hand, if you try to take all the blame, those being led aren't likely to let you shoulder all the responsibility—even if it's your fault.*

To help remember both the Law of Blame and the one that follows, the Law of Credit, we might remember the words of Bear Bryant, the “immortal” football coach at the University of Alabama. He said:

I'm just a plow hand from Arkansas, but I have learned how to hold a team together. How to lift some men up, how to calm down others, until finally they've got one heartbeat together, a team. There's just three things I'd ever say: If anything goes bad, I did it. If anything goes semi-good, then we did it. If anything goes real good, then you did it. That's all it takes to get people to win football games for you.

This is a practical application of the Law of Blame as well as the Law of Credit. And it applies to our work with everyone we lead.

## **A KEY TO ACCOUNTABILITY**

Without question, we can't get enough advice or have enough information regarding how to pinpoint problems and the people who caused them—much less confront and correct those we lead. And our leading is facilitated when we can get those we lead to accept responsibility for what they have or have not achieved. That's why we spend so much time hoping and wishing that those being led will accept and fulfill their responsibilities—and urging and actually teaching them to do so. Yet if we don't understand human behavior, we may find more failure than success when it comes to correcting problems and mistakes and leading the people who make them.

This law can be extremely beneficial in helping us get those we lead to admit mistakes as well as accept and fulfill their responsibilities and be accountable. After all, the immediate response many give when confronted

with having made a mistake is, “it wasn’t my fault.” Without knowledge of and compliance with this law, we may approach our leadership responsibility in a way that turns those being led off to the error at hand—and to us. Worse, we may find that every effort to create a positive solution to a problem ends in a negative outcome. This is the lesson taught by the Law of Blame. This law tells us to take some or all of the responsibility for mistakes if we want those being led to accept responsibility as well. Even if a mistake wasn’t our fault, this can be the best leadership stance to take.

Therefore, when a student, staff member, or parent misinterprets directions or performs a task incorrectly, the leader should simply refuse to blame—and openly accept all the blame for the failure. Why? More often than not, when we take the blame, the immediate response from the student, teacher, or parent is likely to be: “No, it wasn’t all your fault; it was my fault, too.”

### **TRY TAKING THE BLAME**

If we want those being led to accept responsibility, we must try accepting total—not partial—blame for everything and anything that goes wrong within the realm of our leadership. We’ll be surprised how much easier it is for people to admit that they were responsible when we take this stance. If we examine our own response when someone tried to blame us totally—or absolve us totally—we’ll see why and how this law works so consistently.

There’s another reason why adhering to this law will almost always help a leader. The need for autonomy is within us all. We all have a need to control our own lives. Only the degree of this need varies within us. Therefore, when someone tries to take total blame, we often can’t let him or her. To do so would infringe upon the need we all have to control our own lives.

Without accepting this law, you may automatically—and rightfully in some instances—take action which compounds the problem. For instance, a teacher may rightfully blame students for not listening or not following directions. Remember, however, one of the hardest things for people to say is “I was wrong” or “It was my fault.” And it often takes a special approach and unique action to get them to do so.

Remembering the Law of Blame will serve you well when you want to correct problems. It will help you when you want to get people to accept responsibility. It will help when you want to motivate those being led to positive and immediate action. Know, too, that when a leader tries to pass

along or give the responsibility for failure to someone else, that leader gives up a measure of leadership control. In the process, those being led will not follow or have respect for the leader who takes such a stance. In addition, those being led may absolve themselves of all responsibility in the process—even for their own blatant mistakes. It's almost impossible to get those being led to want your leadership if you habitually place blame.

## **THE LAW OF CREDIT**

*Rationale: If a leader does something extremely well or experiences a big success and tries to take all the credit, those being led may deny him or her any credit. If the leader tries to give those being led all the credit—even when deserved—they will not take it and will insist that the leader take a degree of the accolades.*

A leader must handle success, achievement, and credit with extreme care. In truth, if you try to take all the credit—even when you've earned it—those being led may allow you to take bows, but they'll do so reluctantly. And they are very likely to do so with big reservations or outright disclaimers.

On the other hand, if you don't take any credit for an obvious success, those being led may actually force credit upon you. They may even give you all the credit. In the process, they may automatically diminish the contributions of others, including their own.

Indeed, the human condition is often a predictable contradiction in thinking, emotion, and action. That's why a leader must understand human behavior and the responses that can be expected from those being led. Remember this law relative to your next achievement or success. It can serve you well.

### **COACHES GIVE USA GOOD EXAMPLE**

The Law of Credit is obvious in athletic situations. If, for instance, our coaches blamed the players rather than themselves after a loss—or tried to take all the credit for a win—we know what would eventually happen. They probably wouldn't have their jobs very long.

That's why, when the team wins, the highly-successful coach usually insists to reporters that "it's because of the character, commitment, hard work, selflessness, and dedication of the athletes." Then all are allowed to arrive at the correct conclusion regarding the contribution of the coach when it comes to any success or failure: Everyone involved was responsible to some degree. If, on the other hand, the coach took the credit for "making a team out of nothing" or "developing a superior game plan," we all know how people would respond, including the players.

Remember, if we put ourselves first and foremost when it comes to taking credit, we are making a mistake. We are not acting intelligently. When our need for achievement, recognition, and praise from others becomes a priority and we act out of it, our needs and our achievements are likely to be denied. Human behavior tells us why. And that's why the Law of Credit gives us the actions which are most likely to manage achievement and recognition appropriately. We would be wise to adhere to this law.

**THE  
LAW:  
APPLIED**

1. What individual needs are met by adhering to this law?
2. When a leader takes all the credit, what reactions have you witnessed?
3. Did the response have long-term results? Discuss.
4. Discuss the expectations you hold for the behavior of leaders when success has been experienced.