

A PHILOSOPHY FOR EVERYDAY LIVING

Preamble

A daydream of mine, destined to be unfulfilled, is to know how my grandfathers saw life – in a sense, what their philosophy for everyday living was. What follows, like the grab-bag of personal musings I've penned over the past fifteen years, was put to paper primarily for my grandchildren and their offspring. I trust that my descendants will, as I would have, welcome an insight into (if not agree with) one of their ancestors. I am sending it to you as part of my intermittent mailings to Family, Friends and Colleagues with whom I share my scribbling.

This has been troublesome to write. I suspect it may prove difficult to read. Not because it is badly written – it's passable, but because it confronts the way in which we fail ourselves, each other and the planet by duck shoving issues. It allows no wriggle room. Rewritten several times, I have failed to make it more palatable.

Being A Victim Of Others And Of Circumstance

I still feel discomfited, even incompetent around the countless times I've passed the buck. That is, shifted the burden of responsibility for my mess, mistakes, misadventures... for life unfolding in ways that didn't suit me. I blamed him, her or THEM! God and the devil were accused. Luck, or its lack, was another. It was beyond my awareness at those points in time to be accountable for my thinking, feelings and actions (and consequently my life). The weather, seasons, Government, the economy, all were held as the source of my discomfort or difficulty at one time or another. Of course, it was the fault of my first, then second wife, children, stepchildren, blood relatives, in-laws, friends and neighbours. And let's not forget my employees, customers and suppliers. The censure was indiscriminate; just as long as I wasn't to blame for my awful actions, critical words or pear-shaped

endeavours. He, she, they, them or it, caused me to be the way I was, or made me do what I did... but only if the result was poor. Odd that... I always claimed success as mine. And the grand-daddy of all buck-passing (one that has spawned a global burden-shifting industry: psycho-analysis and its derivatives), my parents. They were my real problem. I enshrined them as the genesis for what went wrong with me and my life. Physical and psychological abuse, being an only child, not having the right physical or intellectual genes, my lack of education, opportunity, timing... all or some combination of the above established that I was not responsible for who and how I was and what befell me. Poor me! I was the genuine victim of circumstance.

Get the picture?

Getting A Fresh Start

Then what changed? How did I unearth the fact that the buck really did end with me? That I was responsible for my life! Nobody else! No circumstance was at fault!

What enabled me to fully understand that I was the author of my experience... that there was nothing outside my mind creating my reality? What shifted within my consciousness to allow me to see that my life truly is an inside-out experience, not the outside-in reality I had always imagined (and still do when lost in self absorption)?

It was October 1992. I was in picturesque Tiburon across the bay from San Francisco attending a five day Philosophy of Everyday Living Seminar (POEL). It was named differently back then. On day three, although I had read and heard the same thing in numerous ways before, this time it was a revelation: what I think is my reality... the only reality I will ever know. I woke to this fact of life: nothing exists for me except through my thinking. Much later, in another place, again in the tick of a clock, I saw that my thinking was more than my brain at work. Thinking was the continuous expression of the Life energy called Thought; the creative force with which we fashion our lives 24/7. Without which we have no life.

Are you wondering where this is leading? What the point is?

It's this: that split second discovery within my mind, via Thought, freed me from victimhood. Passing the buck was no longer part of my every day, unless of course I forgot the context of my life. I think my experience, my reality, into being. My experience is not being imposed upon me no matter how it looks and feels to the contrary. My reality is exclusive to me. And it follows that the same holds true for the rest of humanity.

Once awake to the truth that I shifted responsibility as a way of life, I started noticing how common that aspect of human behaviour was in others as well – how pervasive blaming and pointing the finger was in our culture. And more to the point, how that innocently learnt habit, as students of our many teachers, damages or destroys relationships, our health, the environment and (the now topic du jour) the economy. And the biggie: how shifting responsibility frustrates our spiritual relationship with God (or from my reality; Life).

You, like me, may have grown up unaware that a mature human being takes responsibility and is accountable for thinking, feelings and actions...life. As it has been, is right now, and will be in the future – the cessation of attributing blame to anyone or anything.

Passing The Buck

Let me give you examples of passing the buck, each making some jarring and/or challenging assertions. And while I acknowledge that there are equally strong views to the contrary in what I am about to express; I ask that you suspend judgement until you have read each one.

Our lives are fabricated by these and many other facets of 21st Century tests of self-responsibility. You may think of others.

Nowhere is duck-shoving more evident, and more invisible to us, than in our personal relationships. And it's in childhood where we become predominantly responsible or irresponsible (in my view, mostly the latter). Very early on we adopt as our own, not what we are told by our parents and significant others but what we observe; the way we see and hear them live their lives day in, day out. Indelibly imprinted lessons, modelled day after day from our life teachers (some useful and some not so) 'steering' us through life. Once the die is cast it is difficult to transform: from routinely shifting the burden, to an assumption of responsibility for one's thinking, feelings and actions. Passing the buck, learnt as a youngster, shows up in how we think, feel and behave for the rest of our lives, and is illustrated in the following (that is, unless we experience a new beginning and see life from a clearer vantage point):

- Mother chastises her child: "Daddy will be furious when he finds out." Or: "Wait till Daddy gets home and finds out what a bad boy you have been." The mother here innocently passes the buck to the father, for whatever reason, rather than being accountable for instilling discipline herself. This particular shifting of responsibility (in various forms) shows up later in life; particularly in organisations...
- A supervisor, rather than taking responsibility for something he needs to achieve, will hide behind an authority figure (who may or may not have been involved in what is to be said and done). He will say something like: "The Boss was very upset..." or "The Directors want you to..." or "The CEO has changed his mind and..." Each time we shift the burden of responsibility by passing the buck upwards, we become weaker as a leader.
- Father, not wanting to speak with a phone caller, foists responsibility onto his child: "Tell the man Daddy is not home." Here we have a double whammy... passing responsibility to the child to deal with the caller and importantly, teaching the child that it is ok to lie. This early lesson shows up in all sorts of avoidance in later life. We habitually get others to do our dirty work rather than face it ourselves. It also manifests in the so-called white lies we live so comfortably with... duck shoving to

a lie rather than dealing with the truth. (The latest research shows that 98% of us lie. Is it any wonder?)

- Children learn quickly to flick past responsibility. When confronted over some misdemeanour, for the most part, kids will say that “he, she, they made me do it.” Parents, grandparents, assorted ‘rellies’ and friends all buy into this classic piece of duck shoving – the rationale being that ‘children are by definition not mature enough to be responsible’ for their actions. After years of collusion you will hear the chorus: “Johnny was such a good boy. It’s a pity he fell in with the wrong crowd. Look how they have led him astray.”
- Increasingly, parents (particularly protective mums) find it hard to free their children to take on responsibility for their actions. Instead, they join with their offspring in the buck passing. That irresponsible thinking is so prevalent in Western society that a myth of giant proportions has developed around the notion that peer pressure is the cause of counterproductive or even illegal behaviour. In fact, many so-called experts support the idea. Psychologist, psychiatrists, sociologists, social workers and a host of other well intentioned individuals perpetuate this myth, aided and abetted by the media.
- Rather than coaching our kids in responsibility, we give in to their demands on the one hand or create a protective ‘nanny’ culture around them on the other. We give in to them when we fail to hold them accountable. We create a nanny culture when we support government prohibitions rather than educating our child in being responsible. Early unchallenged experiences of buck passing are a primary cause of our inability to accept responsibility.

By John A Wood