

How Taking on Other People's Issues Impacts Your Effectiveness

In today's busy world where boundaries are blurred, it's easy for personal issues to become workplace performance problems. Whether it's your elderly parents, your grown children, or your best friend going through a difficult time, taking ownership of other people's emotional issues can severely impact your effectiveness and efficiency in ways you may not realize. Without knowing it you internalize what you hear, be it from family members, co-workers or close friends.

When you feel responsible for other people's pain, you get trapped on the [Drama Triangle](#) as a rescuer. Then what happens when nothing you do eases their pain? You eventually feel like a victim yourself.

I recently heard from a retreat participant about how her life had changed after she learned how to stop taking on other people's issues. **Read what my subscriber said about her experience:**

My parents are currently in the middle of getting a divorce. My mom would call and gripe about my father, leaving me to think of him in utter disgust. My father, in turn would do the same of my mother but not quite as badly. At the end of these countless phone calls, I felt as though I was stuck between a rock and a hard place – I was taking on their anger, frustration, etc. and it would weigh me down. One day, when my mom was on her soap box about my dad, I said, "Mom, this is your divorce, not mine." Naturally, she did not like hearing what I said but I followed-up with "I have no idea what's it like to be divorced from the man you were married to for 30 years but I am trying to understand where you are coming from. I need you to understand where I am coming from, that the man you are talking about, your husband, is my dad.

The Tool for Transformation

In my workshops I offer skills that I call "Tools for Transformation." The tools are more than mere communication skills. To be transformative, there is an energetic shift, and a new mindset. Communication skills alone hardly ever work without doing the inner work of self-awareness and setting the right intention.

Step 1: Become aware of your emotions

How do you feel? Are you feeling trapped? Locked in the middle? Uncomfortable? Do you have the urge to fix it, to ease their pain, to make it all better? The first step is to become aware of your emotions. Chances are, if you have a strong emotional reaction it means you are taking on more than you need to.

Step 2: Observe your mind

The mindset part of this is asking yourself the question: Does this belong to me? Is this my problem to solve? Is this person asking for me to help or just venting?

Step 3: Acknowledge by listening

Find a way to acknowledge someone else's reality without agreeing or rescuing. Example: "Mom, I have no idea what it's like to be going through this, " Or, "You must be angry..."

Step 4: Set a boundary

Then the boundary part: This divorce is yours, not mine." Then you decide what you want from the other person. Example: I need you to talk to dad about this, or your counselor, but not me. Another Example: I want to change the subject because I can't help you and I'm starting to take this on.

In the end, you will use these tools to customize your way of responding that is authentic and drama-free. In the meantime, you can use these tips as a blueprint for practice and critical thinking. As my subscriber said:

Sometimes it's scary to use 'the line' but it is needed. In doing so, I have felt absolutely liberated and empowered because I am able to disassociate myself from other people's problems, stressors, frustrations and the like. I mean we all have them, so why add someone else's to yours?

Can you see how learning how to own your own issues and not take on other people's problems would benefit you in any leadership role? Your energy would be clear, your focus laser sharp, and your productivity and personal effectiveness would be off the charts.

The graphic for 'Points to Ponder' consists of a cluster of grey dots of varying sizes, arranged in a roughly circular pattern, centered above the text.

Points to Ponder

1. What issues do you take on that do not belong to you?
2. Do your personal issues with family impact your workplace performance?
3. When are you more likely to internalize someone else's problems?
4. Where do you need to set a boundary?