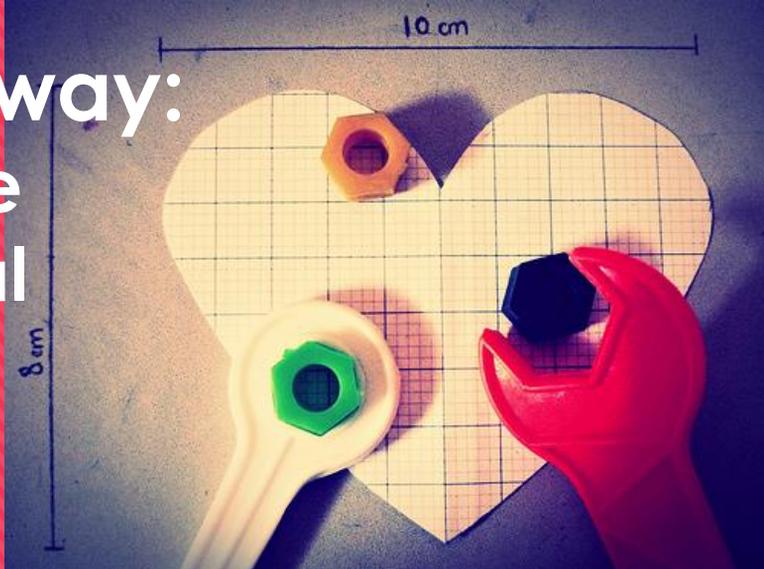


# Take My Pain Away: How we often give away our personal accountability



By Steve Bernard  
October 2014

It was a quiet Sunday afternoon at Euston and we were minding our own business travelling to some client work in Manchester. So who should we bump into on the same train, Marcus, a professional friend and client of ours. After completing some work we shared a brief conversation with him that was very insightful.

Marcus is an experienced Health Practitioner who moved out of practice and into management a few years ago. As we got talking about his motivations to leave practice he described how over time, there was a trend in his mind of clients literally 'giving you their pain' and asking you to deal with it. As he cupped his hands to gesture the 'giving the pain to someone else to deal with', the point was crystal clear. You can't really help, heal or support someone that doesn't want to improve the situation for themselves; they will simply fall back into the same or similar position, or worst still, grow a dependency on you.

In our work, whether it's coaching, consulting or skills and capability development, we see the same trend. A few years back we worked with an international client; it was probably one of our longer standing clients, having supported them for over 4 years. Had the situation improved during that time? Were they a better or higher performing team? Not really. Why? The motivation and ability of the sponsor to hold himself accountable to behavioural and structural change just wasn't there. The accountability was handed to us as professional advisers instead.

When it comes to change of any kind, it really is the individual who must take ownership and hold themselves accountable. This is notwithstanding the guidance, support, kindness and empathy of others. Don't get me wrong – these are game changing ingredients but they just cannot substitute accountability.

So why is it we can all be so slippery when it comes to shifting patterns of behaviour and change in general? Here are x2 things to consider:

## Adopting 'Victim Mode'

We can easily adopt a sense of being in **'Victim Mode'**. Here we act and respond to a situation in a powerless way, safe in the knowledge that there is just nothing we can really do to impact our fate or the circumstances. I say easy because it is - it requires absolutely no responsibility. By permanently staying put in a view that blames the 'other' or circumstances, we project the focus outwards and ignore our own role and actions and choices we make. In Victim Mode we are done to and there is nothing we can do about it.

## Feeling Un-Resourceful

Even when we may be willing to take some ownership, we may be in a permanently low state of **resourcefulness**; it could be anything from being over tired, unwell, being poorly nourished or isolating ourselves from social contact or other potential forms of support. If this is the case the likelihood of us sustaining a change for the better is very low.

While easy, the problem with giving our pain (or any problem) away to someone else is that when doing so we also disable our own natural source of power. The next time things are tough and you feel like offloading the problem, take a moment to think about why you might be genuinely motivated to change. When you do that you are one step closer to seeing your own resourcefulness and other options and tools that are available to you including how you see the situation in the first place.