

Management and the “All Blame Migrates” principle

By Colm McCormack, January 2009.

Using the Theory of Demands, Constraints, Choices¹

This migrating blame principle first appeared in **Just Manage It! If You Cannot Manage Yourself You Cannot Manage Others.**² The principle featured in that book to ensure that as managers we avoid upfront laziness thereby making the entire job of managing later much easier: we must always avoid short-term solutions devoid of long-term focus. As the book explains, choosing laziness or inadequate procedures or investigative results sees us increase the demands made of us in our managerial roles and increases the constraints under which we must meet those demands.

The principle simply states the following: *All Blame Migrates* - sooner or later. Imagine someone is lazy while you do all the work. Going ballistic in front of your spouse when you get home is understandable but only for a limited period of time. After a while, not confronting the particular employee or going higher up the chain of command allows the blame migrate from the lazy

employee to *you*. Lawyers will be very familiar with this concept. When you are on notice of someone causing you loss but you fail to act to limit that loss, instead pointing the finger of blame at others, eventually *you* will be penalized for failing to mitigate your own loss.

Managers Must Look to Humans, Not Systems, Rules, Procedures...

When managing, you must bear in mind that systems, processes, procedures – all of these things – may attract attention when things go wrong. But blame prefers the company of people, not systems, I.T. infrastructure, decisions, or machines. Someone designed, installed, and then maintained these things. Somebody made the relevant decisions. With the fullness of time, blame will find its own way home: back to the *actual* source – a human! And the source, more often than not, is to be found lurking within the management ranks.

When I demonstrated in previous jobs that I was a good worker yet was never promoted, I naturally blamed the managers. But how long could I go on blaming them – right up to my retirement? Would I spend the next thirty years blaming others for holding me back? Maybe, but I would have been wrong to do so. I *knew* they were holding me back. I *knew* they would not change. Before long, the blame would migrate to me since I was the only factor

¹ See the extensive work and numerous books of Professor Rosemary Stewart of Templeton College, University of Oxford in the United Kingdom. A brief overview can be had from: *Demands, Constraints, Choices and Discretion: An Introduction to the Work of Rosemary Stewart*. The Leadership Quarterly, 14, (2003) 193-238.

² For further details and FREE chapter download, go to: www.ColmMcCormack.com

in the equation that was capable of changing the result: I had to leave and move on.

Blaming Employees May Ultimately See Blame Migrate to the Manager Instead

This principle that “All Blame Migrates” is of crucial importance in business. Blaming employees for making mistakes that go undetected or uncorrected for a period of time, or for which they are not properly trained, allows the blame to migrate to their manager. Managers must have the courage to address the problem in an effective and meaningful way. We see a wide range of problems almost everyday in the work setting: people arriving late, not pulling their own weight, causing problems, spreading gossip, bullying and harassing, all done while the rest of us sit back and point the finger of blame at the offenders. In reality, however, the blame in such instances migrates very quickly from the actors to the audience. As managers, we must have the courage to recognize that not only must we be a part of the solution: very often, we are a part of the problem!

Take the Time, Make the Effort: Manage Yourself and Others Away from the Usual Everyday Nonsense.

Why accept poor investigations that place blame on a secondary source – thereby placing ourselves in the league of incompetents? Time, effort, and discomfort seem to be such fertile breeding grounds for short-term solutions with short-term focus. And yet, every day, it is these very excuses, masked as “reasons”, that managers opt for.

It is only by learning to manage yourself first – before trying to manage others – that you can ever come to fully accept the importance of this principle. It is your ticket to a more effective and suitable style of management. Fire-fighting, band-aiding, and dealing with symptoms instead of the cause, can all find their routes in a failure to manage yourself effectively and a failure to recognize that not changing behavior or outlook can lead to blame migrating to you. So much of the problems faced by the average manager spring from his/her own attitudes, beliefs, behavior, and approach. The “All Blame Migrates” principle is one of the first along the road to more effective and suitable management.



Colm McCormack has lectured in Management, Strategic Management, and Leadership on MBA and continuing education programs. He has consulted for numerous companies and Mentored business owners. He is the author of the “**Just Manage It!**” series of Business & Management books. Visit www.ColmMcCormack.com to download FREE chapters, to view key concepts and models, and to purchase Books from the series.