

# Eleven Enablers of Irresponsibility

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It seems to be the norm these days for people not to take responsibility. It may be premature to announce the death of responsibility, but whether in the workplace, government, or home, people too often avoid responsibility. Employees, politicians, neighbors, bosses, doctors, police officers, teachers, and our own children regularly avoid taking responsibility. There are countless reasons and excuses ranging from avoidance of legal liability to laziness, but what many people think are the reasons are only symptoms. If you are a manager, parent, government official, or anyone in a position of leadership, you might not like my view of the real reason.

Please forgive my candor, but I believe the fundamental reason that people aren't taking ownership and behaving responsibly is because of how they are being raised, managed, and led. It is parents who aren't parenting, leaders who aren't leading, and public servants who aren't serving who are enabling a society of irresponsible people. It is people in positions of influence who don't have the courage to tell the truth, risk being unpopular, hold people accountable, or do what's truly best for people who create the conditions of entitlement which we now live with. Yes you can blame a few underperformers for being lazy and welfare recipients for becoming dependent on hand-outs, but is it not the people who promote and enable entitlement who are creating the problem?

I prefer to look at what people should be doing instead of what they shouldn't, but maybe it is time people think about what they need to stop doing that is causing entitlement and irresponsibility. With that perspective, here are eleven *enablers of irresponsibility* that parents, leaders, teachers, and government officials perpetuate that result in their children, employees, and citizens not taking responsibility. If you are in a position of influence, consider which of these you might be perpetrating and need to stop in order for those within your sphere of influence to become more responsible:

- 1. Bad example** – People mimic others, especially those who have power and authority over them. To fit in, people conform to social norms and the unspoken albeit obvious values of others. When a parent, manager, or government official breaks the law, violates an ethical standard, or avoids taking responsibility, it should be no surprise that others follow and do the same.
- 2. Unawareness** – People don't take responsibility when they are unaware of their need to do so. As obvious as it might be to people's parents and managers, many people don't have a clue they are being irresponsible. Without an empathetic yet courageous manager or parent to offer them constructive and candid feedback, they don't know. Because managers and others strive to be politically correct team players, they don't give people the hard truth they need to hear.
- 3. Lack of goals** – Without a purpose or goal, people have nothing to strive for and take responsibility for. They have nothing to hope for and be excited about. Their actions have no meaning or relevance. Parents, managers, and leaders who don't encourage, motivate, and inspire people to set goals and pursue their ambitions leave their people feeling apathetic and lost. People without goals are like people driving on a trip without a destination. They simply drive day after day without any real intent to reach any particular place so any place will do.
- 4. Lack of plan** – A goal without a plan is nothing more than a dream. For a dream or goal to become reality, it needs to be actionable. It needs a plan of actions that move it from something to think about to something to do. Managers and parents who don't facilitate detailed planning leave important details to chance. It is only through detailed planning that obstacles are anticipated and workarounds conceived. A goal without a plan is like trying to reach a destination, but without a map or directions.
- 5. Disorganization** – A plan is only helpful to someone if they follow it. People need to be organized, focused, and disciplined enough to perform the daily tasks they need to perform to make progress against their plan. Managers and parents who don't promote the need to maintain to-do lists, prioritize activities, organize schedules, follow best practices, and systematize workflow, cause people to be unproductive, disorganized, and irresponsible.



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6. **Bad habits** – Success or failure ultimately comes down to the habits that people create. When people establish good daily habits, they succeed. When they don't practice good daily habits, they don't succeed. Managers and parents who don't help people create good daily habits should expect irresponsibility and poor performance. It is only by knowing and practicing good daily habits that people are consistently successful.
7. **Telling** – Telling people what to do is ineffective. Parents who constantly tell their children what to do and how to do it, and managers who do the same for their employees, prevent people from thinking for themselves. People don't learn how to think and act on their own when they are trained to wait for instructions on what to do next. People become programmed to turn their brain off and follow rather than to initiate action and take ownership for themselves.
8. **Dependency** – People who receive their direction, support, and sustenance from others become dependent. Parents and managers who don't require their people to think, work, cleanup, and earn on their own produce people who are dependent. They create people who expect others to take responsibility for them. They produce people who take their sustenance for granted and become entitled. They produce people who expect to be taken care of rather than people who take care of themselves.
9. **Comfort** – Parents, managers, and government leaders who prevent their children, employees, or citizens from experiencing adversity do them a great disservice. It is natural for people to want to be comfortable and enjoy prosperity, but a little discomfort is all right. In fact, discomfort is essential to people's wellbeing. People's ability to change and grow depends on discomfort. People don't grow, learn, appreciate, or take responsibility when always within the confines of their comfort zone.
10. **Lack of consequences** – When there are no consequences for taking versus not taking responsibility, people don't take it. When parents, managers, and public leaders don't hold people accountable, they are training people not to take responsibility. When parents and managers don't praise people for their good efforts, or punish them for their poor efforts, they are training people not to care. When there is nothing to be gained or avoided, most people see little reason to give much effort.
11. **“Good enough” mentality** – When parents and leaders accept mediocrity, they promote a “good enough” mentality that conditions people to not take responsibility. The more that people accept mediocre standards, the less responsibility they take and the less effort they put into their work. Without an appreciation for the value of quality, people give their work less time, attention, and discipline. People think, “Why should I bother striving for excellence when mediocrity is good enough?”

If you aspire for the people you have influence over to be responsible, don't perpetuate these eleven enablers of irresponsibility. Instead, set the example of responsibility for others to follow. Have the courage to be constructively candid with people. Encourage people in the formulation of their goals and assist them in creating the plans needed to achieve their goals. Help people form good habits and practice daily discipline. Coach and develop people instead of telling them what to do. Enable, empower, and liberate people to use their abilities. Stop any ongoing handouts that create sustained entitlement and dependence. Allow people to make mistakes and experience temporary adversity. Set clear expectations and hold people accountable to them. Ensure people know and experience the consequences of their behaviors – both the rewards and punishments. Don't accept mediocrity. Help people see the value of excellence and help them pursue it.

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Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* ([www.activatingyourambition.com](http://www.activatingyourambition.com)), and president of Alpine Link Corp ([www.alpinelink.com](http://www.alpinelink.com)), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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