

Someone to Blame for How Bad You Feel

by Lynne Forrest

Some of the most potent life lessons are designed to show us how dangerous we are to those around us when we are not able to love and forgive ourselves. That's because when we feel angry and unforgiving towards ourselves, we automatically feel angry and unloving towards others. In other words, abusing ourselves naturally leads to abusing others. We become Persecutors – someone who strikes-out - and we live out our relationships on the Victim Triangle.

Here's an example:

Eighteen year old Larry hated himself. He felt misunderstood and outcast in his family who vilified him. He misbehaved and got in trouble with whatever authority he was placed under. The more wrath they turned on him the more he misbehaved. But, it was *his opinion of himself* that turned him into someone dangerous to be around; the more he misbehaved the lower his opinion of himself became. The worse he felt about himself, the more he struck out at others, especially those closest to him.

Larry described it like this:

"When I think about the way I act I can't stand me. I get really mad at myself and I beat myself up on the inside, and feel depressed. Next thing I know I am mistreating my girlfriend, Cindy! *It's like I need somebody else to blame for how bad I feel*, so I pick on her. I start looking for what Cindy's doing wrong so I can justify my bad behavior. *Convincing myself, and Cindy, that it's her fault* makes me feel better - at least for a few minutes and I start feeling all repentant and forgiving and stuff towards her, only to end up mad at her again next time I feel bad."

Notice that the only time Larry feels better is when he can take the heat off of himself by blaming Cindy. That's key in understanding a simple truth: *as long as we go on beating up on ourselves we will need someone else to blame*. Larry's description of himself epitomizes the ancient observation that, *"we treat others the way we treat ourselves."*

As long as Larry hates himself he will attract people who, like himself, tolerate abuse. In other words, He will partner with someone like his girlfriend, Cindy, who shows him, by tolerating his abusive treatment, how he treats (hates) himself. By accepting Larry's abuse, Cindy mirrors to Larry what he does to himself that causes his self-hatred, i.e., he abuses himself.

What about "poor Cindy," you ask? *Why is she with someone as abusive as Larry?* For the same reason that he is with her! Cindy needs Larry because he mirrors for her how she picks on herself. And, just as Larry blames her for making him miserable, Cindy too, blames Larry for her unhappiness. Cindy has her own unique way of blaming.

She says things she thinks will make Larry feel guilty about the way he treats her, for instance. She thinks if she shames him for his inappropriate behavior he will treat her better. But as we heard Larry say above, feeling bad about himself only encourages his mistreatment of others. It fuels, rather than stops, his abusive cycle.

And like Larry, Cindy does not have to accept *responsibility* for the way she abuses herself as long as she can go on blaming Larry and the abusive cycle they have created together continues.

What do we do to transform these abusive situations?

We *take responsibility* for our own unhappiness/happiness. We stop blaming the other person, as if we have no part in the dynamic between us, and instead we use them as the mirror they are designed to be to show us how we mistreat/abuse ourselves.

Instead of being so focused on their mistreatment of us, we identify our own abusive thoughts and beliefs towards ourselves and re-frame them.

We begin to accept and forgive ourselves.

We come to understand that how we feel about ourselves is the key to having loving, healthy relationships with others.