

Marriage Building Block #3
Absolute ownership & responsibility



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Marriage Building Block #3: Absolute ownership and responsibility

"Most people do not really want freedom, because freedom involves responsibility, and most people are frightened of responsibility" ~ Sigmund Freud

In theory this concept is very simple, even elementary.

Take responsibility for your life

However it is an elementary principle, but its anything but elementary in its application.

What does that even mean? It means you take responsibility for all of the choices you have made and are currently making, including all of the actions you have taken inline with those choices and you don't apportion any blame to any other human being. You did it, you own it.

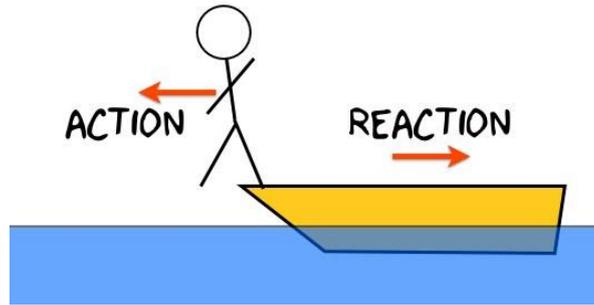
It means you have created exactly what your life looks like right now, yup you and you alone. Incredibly sobering isn't it – yikes.

The fun part is you can make new choices at anytime and begin to change the outcomes you have. As Freud has said above "most people are frightened of responsibility" it's a very powerful thing to be able to impact so much change in your own life. However, if all you have ever created is misery, there is some fear that any choice you make will create even *more* misery. Most of us don't want to take responsibility for our lives, because we were not taught to and only saw examples of other people ignoring their responsibilities for some of us that included parenting us.

Choice: We are all endowed with an eternal gift, choice, you could go as far as to say it's a law. Its truly amazing that at any point I have the freedom to go and do whatever I like at any time, I could rob a bank, I can make love to my wife, I can build a house, make a new dining table, go pick up litter and clean up the street, raise children, eat some food, fix myself a drink, earn money, stay in a job I don't like, get a pet, workout, masturbate, clean the dishes, start a new business, learn how to punch someone in the face, learn how to avoid someone punching me in the face in return, watch television too late, trying to be a perfect parent, ignoring financial management, anger, use pornography, blame my spouse....the list is endless.

Consequences: Unfortunately (or fortunately depends on your perspective), there are consequences associated to every single choice I make, some consequences are favourable, some can be unfavourable, some I can see ahead of time, some I can't see and don't surface until much later. When we exercise our freedom to choose, something amazing happens, things *can* change, it is the trigger for many other things to change in accordance with our choice, this chain reaction is largely out of our control. To a degree we can plan for the consequences of our choices and plan to deal with the outcomes, but largely we live in a world where we are either careless about the consequences and have various other 'effective' means to manage the consequences.

'Effective': Labelling ailments, blaming others, getting angry, claiming it wasn't fair, I can't remember



Physics: Newtons 3rd law of motion - For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction

Choices	Good Consequences	Bad consequences
Rob a bank	I have lots of money	I feel guilty
	I feel safe	If I get caught, I will serve time in prison
		Find it very difficult to get a job after prison
Make a new dining table	Learn something	Takes a lot of time
	We have somewhere to eat	The table isn't perfectly square
	Sense of achievement	Have to treat the table top
	A saleable product	Wood continues to warp
Stay in a job I don't like	I feel safe	Loath going to work
	I have money	Resent being asked to do things
	Don't have to look for another job	Don't have to grow
		Unhappy for a large amount of the day
Trying to be a perfect parent	Study and learn a lot about parenting	Your child doesn't feel loved
	Child gets attention	Husband/wife gets overlooked
	Feel worthwhile	Can't read situations clearly
		Child feels the need to be perfect
Ignore financial management	Feel free for a while	Never peaceful
	Buy nice things	Get into debt
		Lots of fear
		Puts pressure on marriage



		Resentments
Punch someone in the face	Feel strong	Feel guilty
		Get punched in the face or body
		Pain in hand
		Problems don't go away

The above are simply some quick thoughts on some of the consequences of the choices we might make, there are of course many more.

Section 2

Make a list of 3 good choices you are currently making and the associated 'good' and 'bad' consequences of those choices (Be sure to include a choice that you believe is impossible to change)

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Make a list of 3 poor choices you are currently making and the associated 'good' and 'bad' consequences of those choices (Be sure to include a choice that you believe in impossible to change)

1 _____



2 _____

3 _____

Ask your spouse to suggest two choices they see that you are making that are adversely affecting your happiness (no problem if they match your answers above)

1 _____

2 _____

Why do we avoid taking responsibility (which includes overlooking our part in any event)?

Before we look at what problems we have with this, its worth noting the difference between accountability and responsibility

Accountability: When we admit to making a mistake or acknowledge that an issue was our fault, or put our hand up to take on a project, responsibility in the home etc etc

Responsibility: the state or fact of having a duty to deal with something or rectify the mistake we (or another person) created

So we can be accountable and admit something was our fault, but that doesn't necessarily mean we are going to take responsibility for it. We believe that accountability and responsibility go hand in hand and because of that we avoid both. If people were able to see the choices of how to effectively take responsibility without it triggering any of the reasons below, we would be able to see that responsibility is a critical, if not essential, part in our personal and marriage growth. When the demons below rear their heads it really does change things, we no longer are response-able (implying choice) we simply become



reactive. When we react, we are out of control, drunk, unconscious, something else is in control of *us*.

Below are a list of the primary reasons we avoid taking responsibility (this is not an exhaustive list):

<p>#1 I don't like the consequences of the choices I have made</p> <p>The consequences stink, they inconvenience me, I have more important things to do, I didn't know, its not fair</p>	
<p>#2 I am afraid I don't have the resources available to deal with the consequences</p> <p>Afraid that people wont give us enough of their time, not enough money, we haven't got access to enough love, we want to give up</p>	
<p>#3 I don't have to if I can get someone else too</p> <p>Why would I? Consequences are sometimes fun, but when I get someone else to do it, I feel 'cared' for, close to someone, they learn something, I'm too lazy or they do a better job than me so what's the point?</p>	
<p>#4 Nothing I ever do is good enough so what's the point?</p> <p>Have a gaping 'I'm not good enough' wound and were beaten to a pulp in childhood and now have no energy to start over, believe the past will equal the future</p>	
<p>#5 I am completely blinded by what my partner has done to me or should have done for me, in the way they treat me</p> <p>Yes I married my partner but they need to be more aware of what they are doing to me, yes I am choosing to be married to them, but they should just know and just leave me alone, its not my job to love them if they are acting in such an appalling fashion, I have more important things to do</p>	



#6 I have to be wrong

“I was wrong” are perhaps the 3 most loving words we could say to our spouse. BUT it *might* expose us to potential criticism, rejection, isolation and exclusion. If I’m wrong I will feel stupid, I feel powerless, hopeless and its about the only defence I have against this cold, nasty scary world, there is no way I am giving that up, IT ALWAYS WORKED FOR ME BEFORE



#7 Someone might take advantage of me

If I admit I wrong (as above) people might abuse that, take advantage of my kind nature and not see the wrongs that they are doing. I will be a helpless and hopeless weak animal in the hands of a monster with only one thing on their mind



#8 I have to be accountable

I’m struggling already with enough of what I have to do, why do I need more to stick my hand up for? Life is already hard and I feel like I am going to fail at any moment, so it must be someone else’s job, its not my problem



#9 Worry about what others think

People might judge me as being incapable, they might withdraw their love, money or other things away from me. They might no want to be around me and leave me on my own which I HATE btw. As long as I can get through this pain free that’s what I’m going to do



Section 3

Now with the *‘help’ of your partner list the most likely reason you use to avoid taking responsibility.

*help meaning – volunteer your opinion or input only if your partner asks you for it.

If you get angry or upset during this exercise take a time out and come back to it at another time.





Now using the 'bad' choices we made in our previous list on page 4 fill out the below questions:

I am not taking responsibility for choice # 1 or to change this choice because:

I am not taking responsibility for choice # 2 or to change this choice because:

I am not taking responsibility for choice # 3 or to change this choice because:

Why we abuse the choices of others

What we want is a world where our partner does what we want, effectively we want to be making choices for them. We want them to choose the way WE want them to and we certainly don't want to be inconvenienced by the consequences of their stupid choices, so we also have to tell them how to take responsibility for that part too. In effect through our need to control (everything) we are making a person entirely dependent on us to choose everything, except for when to go to the toilet (maybe). When we are in pain, our primary goal is to stop the pain using whatever means necessary. The huge problem here is that when our partners do exactly what WE want them to, we can no longer really feel close to a living breathing human being, we are now close to a robot, we feel safe, but very alone.

Ultimately the only happy way is to accept our partners as they do their best to love us and make choices, then we get to grow and learn some more about how to love them, it's a constant evolution as we unlearn and re-learn what we haven't been taught as children.

What are our marital responsibilities if we want to work towards as much happiness as possible (some listed below)?

- Look and after and protect our own happiness
- Feed ourselves spiritually and emotionally and not expect our partner to do that for us
- Prioritise our spouse in decision making
- Prioritise family in decision making
- Jointly provide for the families temporal, spiritually and emotional needs



What does misplaced choice and lack of responsibility look like in marriage?

Taking responsibility

When we choose to take responsibility (of choice making and consequences) we find some wonderful benefits, it creates trust, dependability, intimacy and strength. We can demonstrate characteristics of integrity, honesty and to a degree vulnerability.

It is important to distinguish between taking and deflecting responsibility for both you and your partner. We use careless throw away comments that protect us and continue to apportion blame (when blaming we are acting like victims and the primary goal of a victim is to avoid taking responsibility for their/a part in a given situation) for example:

Statement	Meaning
"Stop being so sensitive"	I don't know how to love you or deal with your emotions, so if I tell you to stop it I don't actually have to deal with it myself
"Well somebody should have told me.."	I am the centre of the Universe and I can hide that I didn't find out for myself and totally avoid taking responsibility for my mistake
"You should've said something"	If I blame you, I again don't have to be responsible. I can hide that I could have asked and inquired about this issue

Both sides being willing to take ownership of what they have agreed to be responsible for, is a really important component in building a bullet proof marriage.

In owning our part we make a pathway towards being able to apologise and accept that what the choices you are making *can* affect your partner. Your partner learns to take responsibility when they own their behaviours and hold themselves (and ask for your help to hold them) accountable to their actions.

Note: Accepting misplaced Blame

There is an extremely important difference between taking responsibility and accepting misplaced blame. Taking responsibility is never accepting blame for things you didn't do. For example, when your partner tells you that something is your fault, you don't automatically take responsibility for whatever mistake it was.

How do we get more of what you want in your relationship

This is super important, YES SUPER - ask for what you want, ask clearly and as soon as you can

Assumptions in marriage are a big problem - why? Because we communicate our assumptions so poorly if at all. What's more, we impose our choices and course of action as well as our needs on our partner and most of us suck (technical term) at being clear about what we want or expect. Remember it's perfectly reasonable to expect our partners to do something for us providing they have:

A) agreed to

or



B) made a promise

or

C) signed a contract

We tend to be lazy in asking for what we want because:

1) we expect our partners to read our minds

or

2) we don't actually feel worth asking for what we want (or secretly like to feel victimised that no one ever understand us, which can often look like a juicier steak or vegan burger than getting our needs met)

or

3) we don't actually know what we want (cough cough splutter splutter)

It really is a huge part of taking responsibility for our happiness to ask for what we want.....from everyone. We gave up asking as kids because someone can only hear "No!" a certain number of times before they give up completely. It gives people a chance to make their own minds up about their ability or willingness to give what we are asking for, its actually loving to ask, so people know what to expect from you.

What can we do better? ASK ASK ASK ASK. Simply practice asking *without expectations*. Go ahead do it right now ask something of your partner.....if your partner genuinely feels you don't *expect* them to do what you want, its surprising how happy they often are to meet our requests.

Telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth

"and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"

John 8:32 ~ Words of Jesus of Nazareth

Difference between honesty and the truth

Honest – Free of deceit, truthful and sincere

Truth – That which is true in accordance with fact or reality

How are the above different based on dictionary definition? Very little difference really. Despite the term 'fact' being cited in the definition of truth. Let's look at an example to see how they differ.

Kerry works

Honesty has a context that is 'true' in as much as what that person can see with their eyes, ears and experience.

Sarah spent a lot of her time withdrawn in her relationship, she didn't want to speak to her husband for fear of him asking for sex or complaining about her spending money they don't have. This avoidance went on for several days, until they are both stood silently in the kitchen and Sarah answers a text message, this for Don is the last straw, he flips his lid and gives both verbal barrels to Sarah "You don't love me, there is something wrong with you,



you have always been like this, your Mother has taught you this..." on and on for at least 5 minutes.

Honesty - Later that evening Sarah is upset speaking to her friend and she is being honest "He is driving me mad, I was literally in the kitchen making a drink and you text me, I opened the message and then wallop, I got both barrels, he went on and on, lecturing me criticising me, it was actually quite scary, I just wanted him to stop, so I left and went for a drink, I don't want to get back to be honest". The account of Sarahs here IS honest, it IS what actually happened according to *her*. It is NOT however the truth.

The truth – Sarah has been ignoring her partner for several days, not making an effort to communicate, simply carrying an energy of disdain for her husband, which he could feel from her. This energy can really have an impact on a home environment. Don also had a part to play, because he didn't approach Sarah and ask her for some time together or at least begin some dialogue about what has been an issue between the two of them, Don was also allowing resentment to build too. Sarah prioritised other people by responding to her phone and still as of yet not engaged with Don in anyway.

So the truth is that BOTH Don and Sarah were making a contribution to this event or moment of bellowing row and Sarah running off and yet Sarah was actually being honest. The truth trumps honesty everytime is we want to move to a deeper connection and understanding in our relationship. We have to be willing to see 'the facts', not just the world according to us. Witnessing events from our own perspective, will almost always mean we apply a level of distortion according to our own beliefs, judgements, opinions, life experiences and current feelings about that thing or that person – WOW!

There is evidence to prove that following an event, the time it takes for us to modify and edit the details of that event is literally a couple of seconds. In fact we can go a step further according to physicists at the Weizmann insititute in Israel

“quantum theory, states that by the very act of watching, the observer affects the observed reality.”

We literally change what we observe based on who the observer is, so if he have *any* kind of bias you can change the observed. We see this especially in children who has parents that look on in amazement and awe, vs parents who look on with loathing and annoyance – the outcome is obvious.

Before we get anywhere near learning to be loving in our interactions with our partner we have to first identify the most important component in telling the truth, which is – our personal responsibility. This can really take a LOT of learning and practice.

There are also a whole host of factors that play a part in our inability to see things clearly (see modules #1 & #2 + the statement above). So what CAN we do if we are apparently so powerless? Lets look at some examples and see if we can identify and unpick what is going on the following scenarios as well as seeing ourselves in them too.



Example 1 – The dishes

Sharon: “Its his fault that we don’t have any clean cutlery, he forgot to do the dishes, I asked him to”

That is an ‘honest’ account of what happened as far as Sharon can see it

Here is Barneys account

Barney: “We don’t have any cutlery, Sharon usually does the dishes and she didn’t do them this morning”

Telling the truth for both Sharon and Barney starts with a self-awareness, an awareness of your part in the outcome, because almost always, when there is conflict we can guarantee that we have played *some* part in the outcome.

What is THE truth – The dishes weren’t done and no agreement has been made about who is really responsible for dishwashing!

Here is what owning that sounds like and from an apparently minor issue that can lead to world war 78, we can create peace treaty number 1.

Sharon – “I didn’t communicate clearly to Barney that the dishes had to be done, it was shouted down the hallway when he was occupied with something else, that’s my mistake”

Barney – “When I looked in the cutlery drawer and saw there was no cutlery I could have cracked on and washed some for dinner, I chose not to do that, I assumed Sharon was doing it, that’s my mistake, I could have asked if you would have liked me to”

Is there anything else Sharon or Barney could do better here?

Example 2 – The martyr (How could he do this too me after all of my hard work)

Jennifer is speaking with her friend: A difficult handover to Chris this morning. Today he is taking her to nursery for 9am and collecting her from nursery at 5pm. I had text him addresses timings eta and then this morning asked him if he knew what he was doing. To which he says “Not at all, what do I have to do now?”. I explain the drop off and collection agreement and he spends about 5 mins arguing about needing to give car seat to the friend who is kindly collecting Dash and getting him into his ballet kit for class then taking him to her house. I have made all the food. I’m so upset as clearly only I am competent to look after her as, Chris takes no responsibility when asked. Dash has no respect for him!

Friend: It sounds like your morning hasn’t got off to the great start you were hoping for. Would you like me to sympathise with you or help you get clear on how you have helped create this situation? At the moment it seems to be all Chris’s fault and that’s rarely the case. Jennifer is reticent, because she is currently enjoying the sense of superior she gets from being right about how wronged she is by Chris, a place that is NOT conducive to feeling loved and happy.

Jennifer (this is honesty according to Jennifer not the truth): The real reason is, he has a really busy day and hadn’t realised he should really be in the office.



Friend: Ok that's more about him and his stuff, would you like to talk about you because I'm pretty sure you have tried to change him and control him to be more like the way you want him to be and it doesn't seem to be working?

Jennifer: Ok go on then, it wont make any difference, he needs to be listening to this

Friend was wise not to attack Jennifer in this case, friend could have also felt attacked for trying to help, but she chose to see that Jennifer was actually doing her *best* to learn, Jennifer didn't actually want to keep repeating these events on a fortnightly cycle.

Friend: Here are the choices you have made – you chose to marry this guy, you like the degree of safety he brings to your life and marriage, you haven't had to work whilst raising Dash, he is a good man, he does the best he can for all of you, sometimes he could be more responsible and yes that can be challenging, but on the whole he is a good person right?

Jennifer: OK

Friend: You are still choosing to be married to him. You have a gaping great big 'I'm not enough & I don't matter' wound and that has played out in you trying to be super mum and if he interferes with you earning that prize, you could feel hurt and upset, it all seems to be his fault. But a real super wife loves her husband whilst he learns and makes mistakes and keeps doing her best. You are trying to avoid his mistakes by constantly telling him what to do, whilst Dash was young, Chris didn't really get a look in where parenting is concerned did he?

Jennifer: Well he could ask at anytime to do more with Dash

Friend: You are right he could, but remember we are learning about *you* here not him.

Friend was wise not to correct Jennifer, she let her have her say and stayed on track.

Friend: When you speak to him you loathe the earth he walks on, he can feel that, it just makes him feel more stupid and that in turn can lead to him becoming more irresponsible, because he feels that nothing he ever does is enough. Are you able to see more of whats really been going on here? I am not blaming you simply helping you see what you cannot because its hurting you both.

Jennifer: This is really hard to hear but I can understand what you are saying.

Friend: Really good job. If you want Dash to respect his father, you must do so first of all. When you feel more loving towards Chris, you will feel less need to be seen to be this picture-perfect image of you. You'll actually feel happy rather than needing everyone to see that you're happy, they are so different.

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Question for couples discussion: What can Jennifer do to start taking more responsibility for her situation?

What can Chris do to start to take more responsibility for his situation?

Where do you see yourself in this situation?

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Example 3 – The sleepless man

Berry: I sometimes feel subtly blamed that I chose to breastfeed Pillow and the consequences of her clinginess as a result

Ken: (laughs uncomfortably as he realises its true) OK, can you share with me how I do that?

Berry: Yes you compare how easy our other two children were regarding feeding and sleeping, which you took a lot of the responsibility for, I feel that you are communicating that I'm not doing well enough.

Ken took some moments to let this information land, he had a strong need to defend himself, put his armour on and he simply paid attention to that need but didn't let it consume him. He took a deep breath and held Berry's hand. He was smart enough to know Berry needing listening to, she didn't need him to defend himself.

Ken: You are right, I am blaming you. I feel quite powerless regarding how frequently I am inconvenienced by your choice to breastfeed, but she is OUR baby and we both agreed that breastfeeding was the very best start for her, that was MY choice, it was OUR choice. When I blame you, I feel less stupid and like there is a reason why I often feel like I am not coping well I think "Its not my fault", that temporarily relieves my suffering, I really don't like making wrong choices or feeling stupid, it really hurts.

Berry was also wise not to keep going with this whilst Ken really got a handle on how he had been showing up. It was painful for both of them whilst they were working through the consequences of their choices for baby number 3. They weren't yet in a place to choose to do things differently, but they were exactly on course.

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Question for couples: What can Ken do to give up blaming and take more responsibility for his part?

What other choices do they have to improve things?

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Example 4: The dog ate my homework

Sally (12 yrs old) : Mum have you seen my homework I left it on the table?

Mum: No I haven't , why do you never put things away after yourself. You are always leaving things lying around. You are never going to do well in anything if you can't organise yourself better.

It may or may not be obvious here that Mum is blaming, shaming, criticising, generalising, catastrophising. It might be true that Sally *always* does do this, but right in the moment is rarely the best time to teach anybody anything.

Sally: Why do you always have to be so mean?

All Sally could hear was this condemnation and it hurt.



Feeling like a victim, which she is, a victim of an irresponsible parent and a victim of her own poor choices

Mum: I'm not being mean.

Now defends herself and her actions, her right to her own breathable oxygen.

If Mum was willing to see her parental responsibilities clearly here is one other way this have gone

Mums 2nd attempt: I haven't seen your homework honey and this happens at least once per week doesn't it? (Zero frustration) It's actually my job however to teach you how look after your things, to help you learn to be responsible, I haven't done that well up to now.

Would you like me to help you retrace your steps from when you last had it? Then once we have found it, how about we come up with some ideas around where we could put your homework as soon as it's done so it's never lost, a homework home?

Mum and Sally laugh at having to find a homework home but know it's a great idea.

Children go through this loop endlessly (so do we as adults). Sally wasn't really asking for help, she wanted Mum to do it for her, effectively trying to get Mum to be responsible for her poor choices. And whenever that happens our children give us an opportunity to love them, not shame them.

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Question: Can you see anything else that could be done better by either Mum or Sally in this scenario?

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How to work at taking some more responsibility for your life and happiness in your marriage?

- 1) Work things through in your own mind before bringing it up with spouse, or talk it through with a coach or friend
- 2) Every event comprises a multitude of factors in its make up, so your perspective is largely inaccurate unless you have spent time examining the information with an unbiased view (and someone can verify that your perspective is indeed unbiased)
- 3) Remember your partner is wounded, imperfect and they want to be loved too, there is no higher purpose than doing your best to love the person right in front of you and for married couples that's your spouse – a large percent of the time.
- 4) Practice finding and telling the truth about your part to your partner, a coach or to someone who can listen without expressing their judgment (unless you ask for it of course)
- 5) Get clear on your current list of responsibilities, what HAVE you committed to and what are you formally or contractually obliged to deliver?
- 6) Ask your spouse for regular feedback about how you are doing in line with your commitments above? (When they give feedback stay on the topic, that topic being 'you' and try to avoid changing the subject until they are done speaking and you have responded)

