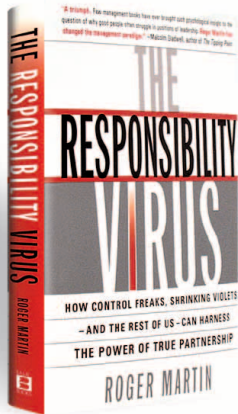


SOUNDVIEW Executive Book Summaries®



By Roger Martin

How Control Freaks, Shrinking Violets (and the Rest Of Us) Can Harness the Power of True Partnership

THE RESPONSIBILITY VIRUS

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Are you a heroic leader? Or are you a passive follower? You may not know it, but chances are you act like one or the other, and it's doing serious damage to your company, your customers and your colleagues. The reason behind your harmful behavior? The fear that you will be held responsible for any failures — which often makes failure the inevitable outcome. This fear of failure and the behaviors it causes are what Roger Martin calls the Responsibility Virus.

The Virus infects corporations and nonprofit organizations large and small, with devastating costs for the institution and its employees. The heroic leader is one who takes on more responsibility than he or she can handle, while the passive follower doesn't take on enough responsibility. One cannot exist without the other. Heroic leaders are convinced their passive followers can't handle responsibility so they shoulder the burden while passive followers sense that responsibility is being taken away and withdraw further. But there is a cure.

CONTENTS

Dynamics of the Responsibility Virus

Pages 2, 3

Costs of the Responsibility Virus

Pages 3, 4, 5

Tools for Inoculating Against the Virus

Pages 5, 6, 7

Fighting the Responsibility Virus

Pages 7, 8

The Challenge Facing Professionals And Directors

Page 8

What You'll Learn In This Summary

- ✓ **How to use the Choice-Structuring Process** to help people work together as a team while minimizing the likelihood anyone will seize or cede control of the decision-making process.
- ✓ **How to use the Frame Experiment** to see problems from the other side and come up with solutions that address the fear of failure.
- ✓ **How to use the Responsibility Ladder**, a development tool that works on building skills in delicate situations, allowing parties to assume enough responsibility to stretch their abilities without overwhelming them.
- ✓ **How to redefine Leadership and Followership** away from the heroic leader and passive follower model to a role that better suits the need to collaborate and become true partners.

THE RESPONSIBILITY VIRUS

by Roger Martin

— THE COMPLETE SUMMARY

Dynamics of the Responsibility Virus

Michael has caught the Responsibility Virus. As the new publisher of *Wapshot* magazine, he was hired to turn the magazine around. Sagging advertising revenues are the immediate crisis. Long-term, he needs to stabilize the magazine's revenue base by increasing the number of ad pages per issue and by increasing the average ad price. His first move is to hire a dynamic sales executive, Caroline.

Shortly after she comes onboard, she learns that a major advertiser is threatening to drop *Wapshot* from its ad plan. When Michael meets with Caroline, he's alarmed by her demeanor. Her confidence is shaken, and she asks for help with a presentation she's making to the advertiser to save the account. Michael panics and takes over the presentation. He saves the account.

The trouble is, he is called on over and over again to make similar presentations. The sales staff's confidence plunges, and Caroline begins to feel as if Michael is undermining her. From her perspective, Michael no longer looks like the dynamic leader he was earlier. She sees him frantically running from meeting to meeting and pitch to pitch. Michael is so busy, he has no time for the long-range strategic planning he was hired to do. Meanwhile, the magazine's owner is quietly looking for a replacement and Caroline threatens to quit.

The offices of *Wapshot* have been infected with a bad case of the Responsibility Virus, an opportunistic organism triggered by the experience of failure. The advertiser's decision to remove the magazine from its ad plan was a symbolic blow that undermined Michael and Caroline's immunity. How could it have been different? How could they have responded to ward off infection and avoid a full-blown outbreak?

Michael should have checked his panic and provided encouragement rather than a bail-out. He could have coached Caroline. Instead, he took over. And Caroline could have checked her fear and asked to brainstorm rather than for direct assistance. That would have constituted productive collaboration and utilized both their skill-sets in combination to produce an outcome superior to the outcome of either working alone. Instead,

Michael assumed responsibility for engineering success and Caroline relinquished it.

Those who are infected with the over-Responsibility Virus often see their efforts as heroic and come to view those they are rescuing as sheep who would be lost without those efforts. The trouble is that taking more responsibility than necessary creates responsibility abdication in those whose responsibilities you are taking. At the same time, as your burden grows you begin to harbor resentment. Ultimately, over-responsibility leads to failure.

Role of the Fear of Failure

Failure often begets failure. In fact, fear of failure actually helps produce the very failure that we fear. Worry too much about spilling a cup of hot coffee, and your hand starts to shake. No one wants to get burned, but why do we fear failure to the extent that we do?

Fear of failure is personal, and it's also universal. Certain governing values lie behind most human interactions. These are:

- **To win and not lose in any interaction;**
- **To maintain control;**
- **To avoid embarrassment; and**
- **To stay rational.**

Over time, we become skilled in designing our interactions to avoid violating these governing values, even if the cost may be outcomes we don't like. Notice that the governing values are really fears — fear of losing, of not being in control, of being humiliated, and of becoming irrationally emotional.

(continued on page 3)

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For Additional Information on the author, go to:
<http://my.summary.com>

Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries (ISSN 0747-2196), P.O. Box 1053, Concordville, PA 19331 USA, a division of Concentrated Knowledge Corporation. Published monthly. Subscriptions: \$195 per year in U.S., Canada & Mexico, and \$275 to all other countries. Periodicals postage paid at Concordville, PA and additional offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Soundview, P.O. Box 1053, Concordville, PA 19331. Copyright © 2003 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries.

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Dynamics of the Responsibility Virus

(continued from page 2)

The flood of fear that we experience at the prospect of failure drives us toward the primitive response choice of “fight or flight.” If we choose “fight” we seize total responsibility for the situation. If we choose “flight” we assume no responsibility. The desire to maintain control causes me to assume full responsibility and to preempt anyone else from seizing control even if doing so means we are trying to do things outside our area or level of expertise. Because we know we may be in over our heads, we tend to avoid collaboration or any situation where we may be exposed.

The problem with seizing control is that the “hero” who does so takes on the challenge alone instead of leveraging the skills and capabilities of others who could help with the task.

Static and Dynamic Conservation of Responsibility

The Responsibility Virus operates according to the law of Conservation of Responsibility. The name is borrowed from the field of thermodynamics, where the First Law states that energy in a closed system is neither created nor destroyed. For example, if a billiard ball is struck by a cue, the energy put into thrusting the cue

forward is transferred to the ball, causing it to move forward.

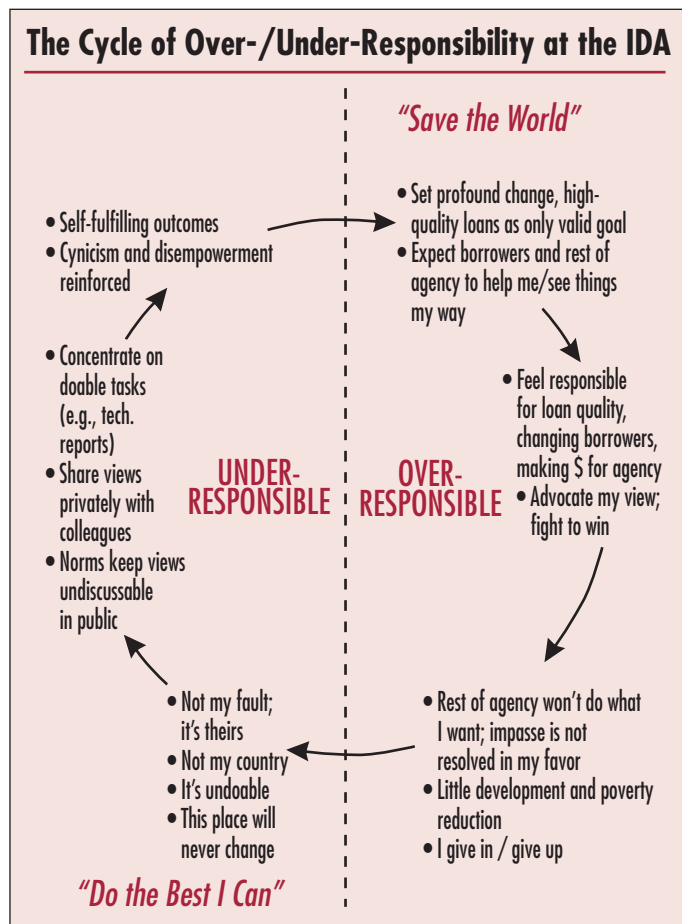
There are two different kinds of Conservation of Responsibility and together they account for most of the damage created by the Responsibility Virus.

● **Static conservation between two individuals at a given point in time; and**

● **Dynamic conservation in a single individual over the course of time.**

What happens is this — as one person becomes over-responsible for a project or business, he takes on more tasks than reasonable or possible. Through his attitude, he makes clear that others should step aside. Rather than fight for control, the other party begins to act under-responsibly in direct proportion to the assumption of responsibility by the other party. Ultimately, the project fails or the company underperforms — but the law of Conservation of Responsibility continues to exert its influence. The over-responsible party becomes disillusioned, bitter and angry. He reacts by becoming under-responsible while the other party then by necessity assumes more responsibility. The cycle repeats itself until and unless the parties recognize the value of collaboration. ■

For Additional Information and an example of the Law of Conservation in operation, go to: <http://my.summary.com>



Costs of the Responsibility Virus

The first major cost of the Responsibility Virus is that it undermines the capacity for genuine, productive collaboration. Diminished collaboration among employees means that companies don't benefit from economies of scale as they grow and globalize. Large projects can't be integrated without taming the virus. The virus also undermines collaboration with other firms, customers and suppliers.

The Death of Collaboration

Collaboration occurs when two or more individuals share meaningful responsibility for producing a choice. *Sharing* means allocating responsibility in rough proportion to each party's choice-making capacity. *Meaningful* implies that sharing the load is important to the outcome — that separately the collaborators couldn't accomplish the task on a consistent basis without the contribution of the other. Collaboration occurs when “we're in charge” not when “I'm in charge and you're not.”

Why is collaboration so hard? Because it violates the value: *maintain control*. Once responsibility is shared, we can no longer keep control of the recognition and

(continued on page 4)

Costs of the Responsibility Virus

(continued from page 3)

rewards that accrue from winning; collaboration therefore runs afoul of the first governing value: *win, don't lose*. Deciding how to allocate responsibility consistent with capabilities can lead to awkward conversations, thus violating the third governing value: *avoid embarrassment*. And if it gets emotionally messy it may violate the value: *stay rational*.

Looked at in light of the governing values, collaboration becomes the very embodiment of the threat of failure. The greatest obstacle to collaboration is that as soon as the collaborative path is initiated, control is compromised, failure cannot be kept at arm's length and embarrassment may ensue. These are the emotional risks that keep organizations from grasping the benefits of collaboration and the economies of scale that collaboration makes possible.

The Development of Mistrust and Misunderstanding

A second cost of the Responsibility Virus is the development of mistrust and misunderstanding. When fear drives work relationships, misunderstanding is a by-product. This happens because to protect against embarrassing conversations and loss of control the parties guess about, rather than ask about, the reasons and motivations of the others. Inevitably guessing at others' motivation leads to errors. The errors create further misunderstanding.

Unchecked misunderstanding then deepens even as each side thinks it understands the other. Each group's perceptions of the other party influence its treatment of the other group. Eventually the misunderstanding evolves into mistrust and resentment. Since the parties don't inquire into the reasoning and motivation of one another, they must fill in the blanks by guessing. The guessing often attributes improper or illicit motives, which are never tested. So when actions arise that are not inconsistent with the attributed nasty motives, the motives appear to have been confirmed and mistrust of future motives and motivation takes shape. Then resentment grows.

Misunderstanding, mistrust and resentment eventually bring about organizational rigidity. It becomes hard for any party to propose significant change because such proposals will be greeted with suspicion and mistrust. The ambient level of mistrust makes it hard to openly discuss any proposal and the true concerns — as a result, the potential resolution of these concerns is typically left buried, only to surface in obscure ways. The Responsibility Virus provides a powerful ally for the status quo in organizations.

How IBM Let Skills Atrophy

Skill atrophy as a side-effect of the Responsibility Virus can be seen in IBM's slow, painful descent. Through the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, IBM's decades of rapid expansion, the leadership explicitly promised its entire work force lifetime employment. The guarantee was seen as critical to success because it was such an attractive inducement in recruiting. But it created an environment in which leadership assumed all responsibility. There was no felt need for all employees to collaborate with leadership to keep the company competitive. No one felt the need to hone business skills to maintain their value or to find another job.

This environment of under-responsibility in the work force and paternalistic over-responsibility in leadership produced a complacent culture that was blown off the road as the computer market fragmented in the 1980s. Layoffs broke the covenant and IBM workers found that their once vaunted skills had atrophied.

Atrophy of Choice-Making Skills

A third cost of the Responsibility Virus is the atrophy of choice-making skills.

Consider this scenario. Ned is the 71-year-old founder, chairman and principal stockholder of the STG empire. Even though it is well past midnight, he puts in a last call to one of the younger men he often runs circles around, the CEO of his long-distance phone business.

"Just checking in, Dick," he begins. "I see the numbers aren't turning around even with the new promotion strategy." This is another late-night interrogation which has become standard operating procedure. Also standard procedure is Dick's response — to see what Ned wants and not give him anything to attack.

"I'm disappointed that the numbers haven't turned around but I'm confident in the new strategy you laid out in the last board meeting," he begins. Immediately Ned reminds Dick that the strategy was just a suggestion and that Dick made the decision. Ned adds "I hope for your sake it turns out well." He finishes the late-night call with another "suggestion," that the company gear up its efforts to enter the consumer market.

The next day Dick gathers his team and tells them, "We're going after the consumer market. Ned sees it as a priority." They go ahead, and next quarter the results are worse than the quarter before, mainly due to the start-up costs of the consumer market initiative. At the next board meeting Ned explodes and demands to know "whose crazy idea was it to pursue the consumer mar-

(continued on page 5)

Costs of the Responsibility Virus

(continued from page 4)

ket?” Dick is on the way out as Ned orders an executive search firm to find a new CEO.

What happened to Dick was predictable. The Responsibility Virus claimed another victim. His decision-making skills had been seriously eroded.

In choice-making ability, as in any other skill, performance levels don't remain static. We either get better or we get worse. If we want to develop skills, we set reasonable goals that stretch our capabilities, placing us in a zone where we are neither anxious about failing nor bored with a routine task. Constant challenge is the only way to maintain the consistent upward tug that comes from assuming responsibilities beyond our current capacity. Without this beneficial tug, growth stops and atrophy sets in.

What happened to Dick was that under Ned's overbearing leadership, he never got a chance to hone his own decision-making skills. Instead, he slowly retreated from making the critical decisions he was hired to make to passively carrying out the chairman's bidding. Not only did Dick lower his responsibility levels, but his management team did as well.

Meanwhile, Ned swirled even higher into over-responsibility. He attempted to make all key choices across all his companies. Unfortunately, brilliant though he might be, not even Ned could stay on top of all the details. Ned is now seen as an intrusive owner whose usefulness has faded. ■

Tools for Inoculating Against the Virus

The challenge for all leaders is to find a choice-making process for groups that:

- **Produces robust and compelling choices, and**
- **Does so without violating the governing values, thus triggering the Responsibility Virus.**

This article examines tools that will help organizations battle the Responsibility Virus. These include the Choice Structuring Process, the Frame Experiment and the Responsibility Ladder.

The Choice Structuring Process

Ridding our conference rooms of the Responsibility Virus when a group is expected to engage in real decision-making requires setting ground rules. The leadership must convey the message that the decision will be the group's. Many members may not believe that — yet.

From there, coming to a decision is a seven-step process. It requires that the group:

1. Frame Choice. A choice is an irreversible commitment. The group must look beyond the problem it is expected to solve to discern the choices for solving it. The choice is framed when a minimum of two mutually exclusive options are identified that would neutralize the problem.

2. Brainstorm Possible Options. Framing the issue as a choice identifies a subset of options, but the next task is to broaden the list. Be inclusive. The list can be pruned later. Welcome options enthusiastically.

3. Specify Conditions. Before an option can make the cut as something to which the group can commit, the group must set the conditions that would have to be substantiated in order to believe it is a valid option. This is the time for those with reservations about an option to speak out. Specify what must be true for an option to be a good choice.

4. Identify Barriers to Choice. At this step, the group identifies those conditions embodied in the choices that it believes least likely to be true.

5. Design Valid Tests. Once key barriers have been defined, they must be tested in ways that the entire group finds compelling. The decision-makers must buy into whatever tests are chosen as valid. The goal is to design tests that will enable every member to commit to making a choice and taking action on the choice if the test confirms that the condition is valid.

6. Conduct Analysis. Test the condition least likely to hold up. If it proves to be wrong, then move to the next.

7. Make Choice. This is almost anti-climactic since the group already has a shared understanding of the logic of the available choices. Testing only serves to confirm that a choice is the right and best one.

The Frame Experiment

What if your choice process is already in terrible shape? Misunderstanding and mistrust have undermined collaboration. Then it is time for a remedial tool to fight the Responsibility Virus and mend frayed relationships.

The Responsibility Virus creates in each party the impression that the other players are progressively more extreme and negative. For us to maintain adherence to our governing values, the other party must, in our view, take on a set of negative attributes. The over-responsible party sees the under-responsible party as lazy and pathetic, while being perceived as controlling and domineering.

When faced with fear of failure, people will frame reality to remove the discomfort. For example, someone who finds no cooperation from others may frame her task as being to take control of the project, viewing herself as the best hope for the project's success. She would frame her view of the others' task as staying out

(continued on page 6)

Tools for Inoculating Against the Virus

(continued from page 5)

of the way and accepting the wisdom of her insight. We frame reality as a way to make sense of the world. As conditions grow worse, our frames grow more extreme.

The tool for breaking out of this self-sealing loop is the Frame Experiment. It arrests the downward spiral and provides the opportunity for an upward spiral to take shape. The existing frame sees oneself as knowing the right answer and the other individual as not getting it, and the task at hand as getting the other to see things “my way.”

The Frame Experiment works to have the participant realize the frame he or she is operating under and adjust it. For example, when someone reframes herself from knowing the answer to having a wealth of data and experience but not seeing and understanding everything, the door is opened for movement. Having reframed her view of herself, she may be ready to reframe the other individual as someone who may see things she doesn't see and who can contribute to her understanding. This then leads to the task becoming accessing collective intelligence to make the best choice rather than getting the other party to see things her way.

The Responsibility Ladder

The Responsibility Ladder is a development tool for improving choice-making capabilities. It is a way of structuring conversations that will yield a better distribution of responsibilities, thus inoculating against the Responsibility Virus.

At the heart of the Responsibility Virus are unproductive conversations — or a lack of conversations — about decision responsibility distribution. The purpose of responsibility conversations is to divide tasks so that the responsibility assigned matches capabilities. This is the only way to maximize individual choice-making ability. These conversations should also build internal commitment and accountability. Finally, they create a sense of collaboration and mutual support.

Discussions of responsibility revolve around different rungs on a ladder — the Responsibility Ladder. At the lowest rung, there is no responsibility. You may have experienced this when a subordinate comes to you with a problem and expects you to solve it. At the next rung, the subordinate would ask you to solve the problem, but indicates a willingness to watch and learn. At the next rung, the subordinate describes the problem but asks for help. Next, the subordinate generates options but asks for a decision. Next, the subordinate provides options and makes a recommendation. Finally, at the top of the Responsibility Ladder, the subordinate considers options, makes a decision, and informs the other party.

Decision-making should not remain at either the top or the bottom level. A subordinate at the bottom needs to develop decision-making skills, while a subordinate at the top isn't being stretched enough in his position or has been infected by the Responsibility Virus. Levels 2 through 5 are where we want to be most of the time.

The goal of group members should be to move up the Responsibility Ladder over time while helping others to do the same. Everyone in your organization should be familiar with the rungs and what level of responsibility each represents. This creates a common language for discussions.

The Redefinition of Leadership and Followership

As head of strategy for WorldNet, a giant global communications firm, 42-year-old Henry is almost a decade younger than others at his level. He has always been identified as a candidate with high potential. His subordinates love him for his upbeat, can-do approach and his human touch.

Lately the CEO, Nick, has been treating Henry as a confidante, perhaps even as heir apparent. Nick put Henry in his present position to stretch his skills without overwhelming him. Henry had hoped for one of two business unit presidencies, but Nick did not want to push aside two other talented executives to place Henry in a position that might have been too much of a stretch.

One of the other executives, Bill, was having performance problems, so Nick asked Henry to help behind the scenes. Henry jumped at the opportunity, thinking that this was his chance to prove he was ready for Bill's job after all. And Bill, realizing right away that this was the CEO's idea, goes along with the plan. He gives Henry the thorny challenges and focuses on easier tasks.

Soon Henry finds himself doing his own and most of Bill's job, but without any public authority to do so. Henry races from assignment to assignment, and finds his reputation taking a beating. Eventually, Nick realizes he has to remove Bill, but also that Henry isn't going to make the successor list for Bill's position after all given his poor performance and his sinking reputation.

Henry has only done what we all expect of a leader. He was asked to solve a problem and he jumped to the rescue. His actions could even be seen by some as heroic. And Henry sought to win by pleasing his boss and mentor, to maintain control by carrying out the mission on his own, and to avoid embarrassment and stay rational by not talking to Bill about the real reason he was helping.

The “leadership” Henry tried to exercise was characterized by splitting responsibility unilaterally (Henry took the toughest tasks), seizing a disproportionate share (Henry saw Bill as incompetent and took over most of his

(continued on page 7)

Churchill and Kennedy as Modern Leaders

Two of the most cherished leaders of the 20th century, Winston Churchill and John F. Kennedy, are revered for asking their followers to take responsibility even more than they are revered for taking it on themselves. Churchill, promising blood, sweat and tears, exhorted his country to hold firm and not give up during the darkest days of the Battle of Britain. “Let us brace ourselves to our duties and so bear ourselves that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for 1,000 years, men will still say: this was their finest hour.”

Kennedy’s most memorable line was not a call for the government to take more responsibility. Rather, it was the admonition, “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.”

In both cases, the call for greater responsibility on the part of the followers created a closer bond between the leader and his constituency, as well as a collective heightening of capabilities, resourcefulness and engagement in the task at hand. Churchill and Kennedy are both guaranteed their place in the pantheon of great leaders.

Tools for Inoculating Against the Virus

(continued from page 6)

job), making the seizing undiscussable (Henry’s task was secret and keeping it secret protected him and his boss from embarrassing questions), and subjecting his performance to private testing (Henry was playing the hero but had no official role, so he was left to judge for himself whether his performance was adequate). Unfortunately, it is a model too many leaders today use.

The modern definition of “followership” is in many ways the mirror image of our view of leadership. If a leader is seen as a hero, the follower is characterized as a loser. This prejudice carries through consistently in structures ranging from social order among primates, to caste systems, to aristocrats and peasants down to our own modern penchant for risk takers over those who play it safe.

What really happened to Henry, who played the classic leader role, and Bill, who played follower? The Responsibility Virus got them. No one was spared embarrassment after all. Bill was mocked for becoming a shell of his former self. Henry was mocked for trying to cover up that he was doing Bill’s job and therefore failing at his own. And Nick was exposed for trying to protect Bill. Both Henry and Bill lost big. In their attempt to protect themselves, they failed to protect any-

thing. They both lost control of the situation.

What all three needed was a productive reframing of leadership and followership. Leadership and followership must be redefined to include:

- Splitting responsibility through dialogue rather than splitting it unilaterally;
- Apportioning responsibility in keeping with capabilities rather than being tempted to take on more than a proportionate share of responsibility or rejecting responsibility;
- Making the apportionment discussable; and
- Subjecting performance to public testing rather than private assessment.

A key feature of modern leadership, then, is the recognition that responsibility must be shared. Responsibility must also be divided in a way that takes into account capacity as well as encouraging professional growth of both leader and follower. Tasks must stretch abilities without overwhelming leader or follower. ■

Fighting the Responsibility Virus

Anyone can be mired in a state of under-responsibility. It happens when you know you’re doing less than you could. You know that you’re losing the capacity to do things that you used to be able to do, and you certainly aren’t moving your skills forward.

Taking on higher responsibility would demand considerable initiative, but your lack of confidence makes that a scary thought. You don’t like the feeling one bit, but you feel too conflicted about it to do anything but ride the gentle spiral downward.

Being stuck in this under-responsible state can be a serious matter and is often a contributing factor in depression. In psychology speak, it is “learned helplessness.” It feeds on itself with increasingly negative self-assessments. Eventually, this will produce a crash. The over-responsive party will falter under the weight and fail. And the longer it takes for the crash to occur, the greater the cost of the Virus. There is less collaboration, greater distancing between leaders and followers, greater misunderstanding and mistrust and greater atrophy of skills.

Mired in Under-Responsibility

How can people pull out of the downward spiral of under-responsibility before the crash? What’s required is a series of baby steps, each doable, each which builds momentum and reinforces the courage to take the next step. The steps require you to:

Visualize the End Result of the Path You’re

(continued on page 8)

Fighting the Responsibility Virus

(continued from page 7)

Traveling. Realize that the over-responsible partner will take on greater and greater responsibility while you will continue to question your capabilities and accept an ever-less-challenging life. Eventually you will be seen as dead wood and be cut. Visualizing this worst case scenario should help you muster the courage to take action. What could be worse than a passive and point-less descent into self-loathing and obsolescence?

Reframe the Over-Responsible Party. Turn your focus on the over-responsible party. Conduct a Frame Experiment to see them in a more productive light. See yourself as capable but mired in under-responsibility and the other party as stuck in over-responsibility. Pledge to work toward a more productive sharing of responsibilities.

Pick a Burning Issue to Work On. Pick the issue of under-responsibility that bothers you most but which you think is addressable. The goal is to arrest the downward spiral.

Engage in a Responsibility Ladder Conversation. Engage your over-responsible counterpart in a conversation, the goal of which is to mutually agree on your taking a higher level and their taking a lower level of responsibility on your issue of choice. Use the Responsibility Ladder to structure the conversation.

Use the Choice-Structuring Tool to Gain Comfort. You can use the choice-structuring tool to explore what division of labor both parties are comfortable with.

Do It and Reflect. Your job is to just do what you agreed to do. Start to carry out the higher level of responsibilities. You may feel frightened at first, but remember that the stakes are far lower when compared to the worst case scenario you face.

Repeat the Above Six Steps Over and Over. Soon you will be out of the downward spiral and on your way to true partnership and collaboration.

Trapped in Over-Responsibility

For every person who feels mired in under-responsibility there is someone who feels trapped in and burdened by over-responsibility. Sometimes it means taking on harder tasks than you're capable of handling, but more often it means loading yourself up with everyone's work until you collapse under the weight.

Take heart. Except in rare cases in which power and responsibility become an obsession, the forces of static conservation of responsibility will break the deadlock. But how can you escape before the crash? Use the same steps that you would use if you were mired in under-responsibility. ■

The Challenge Facing Professionals and Directors

While everyone is prone to infection, the professional represents the most fertile ground for infection. Doctors, lawyers, dentists, engineers, consultants and educators share a common relationship structure that consistently gets them into trouble.

Professionals are by definition expert service providers uniquely qualified in their fields while those who seek them out generally are not. Thus it's easy to develop the attitude of over-responsibility. Professionals tend to be people who like achieving a level of expertise that sets them apart from their fellow man. They also get to play helper and get paid handsomely for their services.

Professionals can overcome the Responsibility Virus by using four tools. These are:

✓ **Redefining Leadership.** Professionals must redefine leadership from meaning taking over all responsibility to working with the client as much as possible. Give the client a productive role to play. Draw the client into a collaborative decision-making process.

✓ **The Choice-Structuring Process.** Recognize the power of choices. For example, patients should have as much information as possible so that they can make informed decisions about treatment.

✓ **The Responsibility Ladder.** Use the principles of the Responsibility Ladder to collaborate with the client.

✓ **The Frame Experiment.** Remember that the client may know something you don't. Reach out to the client and try to understand his or her reasoning.

The Challenge for Boards of Directors

Most CEOs look on their boards as just another constituency to be satisfied. CEOs tend to seize control from directors, who become more passive and dependent on the CEO. But especially in today's climate, directors need to develop relationships based on collaboration and partnership.

The key tool for directors is to use the Responsibility Ladder to guide their thinking. The board must internalize the reality that no single level of responsibility is right for all choices. Sometimes the board wants recommendations, sometimes it wants the CEO to take action without consultation. The trick is to know what decisions belong on what level.

The board and the CEO need to redefine leadership and followership so that there is no clear leader and no clear follower among them. They must collaboratively set levels of responsibility and accountability that are suited to each of their abilities. ■

For Additional Information on fighting the Virus in everyday life, go to: <http://my.summary.com>