

Stop Blaming the Fish creates awareness of their personality defaults.

STOP BLAMING THE FISH: How YOU Affect Your Negotiated Outcomes

by James J. Ranieri

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Dedicated to Dr. Kathryn Ranieri, my love, my partner,
my inspiration, my moral compass and my center

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A Fishing Story

The following is an adaptation of a parable from the Babylonian Talmud.

Once upon a time there was a selfish fisherman who fished in a beautiful lake stocked with an abundance of delicious fish. He had two mates to assist him on his boat with menial tasks, one who was lame and the other who was blind. He selected these two helpers because they were not capable of catching fish due to their disabilities. The fisherman was selfish and wanted to keep all of the fish for himself and he felt confident that their disabilities would prevent them from poaching his fish.

The owner of the boat went away for an extended time, but he did not make provisions for sustenance for the two mates. Near starvation the lame mate said to the blind mate: "I see many beautiful fish in the lake. Come, I will ride on your shoulders, and we will catch them and eat them together."

So the lame mate rode on the shoulders of the blind mate, and they caught and ate all of the fish in the lake.

Days later the fisherman returned and noticed that there were no more fish in the lake. He was furious and asked, "Where are all my splendid fish?" The lame mate replied, "Because you left us with no food we were starving. Have I feet to walk with?" The blind mate replied, "Have I eyes to see with? Acting as one, we were able to catch and eat the fish to keep us from starving." The fisherman became extremely angry, and blamed the mates. He failed to recognize that by not providing food for the mates he had driven them to take matters into their own hands and behave in a way that he had not anticipated.

Like the fisherman, you may attempt to conjure lame excuses, blinded by your self-interests by blaming others or making excuses for problems created by your own doing.

Foreword

“The best way to predict the future is to create it.”

Peter Drucker

Our attention span seems to have collapsed, such that a single transaction encompasses an eternity. While writing this book, I have been concerned that it may seem too counterintuitive or even out of step with today’s new reality because of a pervasive ‘ends justifying the means’ mentality. The path ahead can seem daunting given the recent seismic shifts toward national interests trumping massive global problems, the increasing polarity among political ideologies and religious traditions and the erosion of civility. To be truthful, I wonder if what I am espousing in this book is passé, but I believe that the pendulum has again reached an extreme limit and it will eventually equilibrate back to the center. Tomorrow the sun will again rise in the East, set in the West and cooler heads will prevail. The need for the lessons of this book will continue to increase as people recognize the illusion of permanence and accept that change is in fact the only constant in life.

Chapter I - Stop Blaming The Fish

“He who knows others is wise. He who knows himself is enlightened.”

Lao Tzu

As in the fisherman fable, life offers countless examples of how we tend to justify our own actions and blame others for our problems. We point fingers of blame to everyone except ourselves. Have you ever fished and come away with a less than expected catch and said the fish aren't biting? Why blame the fish? It couldn't be your fault that you didn't catch enough fish. Could it?

Blaming someone or something for our own failures is called scapegoating. Scapegoating uses projection and displacement to focus feelings of aggression, hostility and frustration on someone else. The amount of blame assigned is usually disproportionate and unwarranted. Thoughts and feelings are usually unconsciously projected on another person and they become the scapegoat for problems of our own doing. Whether we get into the wrong lane of traffic, or end up on the slowest check-out line, most of us have developed a core competence in scapegoating by finding someone or something else to blame for problems we create.

The disgruntled fisherman with no catch needs to ask some fundamental questions. Who chose to go fishing on that particular day, in that exact spot, using that bait and equipment? It wasn't the fish. It was the fisherman. By analogy, you may look at negotiations in much the same way. If a deal falls through you might find yourself making excuses, such as, the other person was a better negotiator, or was deceptive, or tricked me or did something unethical. Or, you might claim that the deal didn't come together because someone stacked the deck against you or that the circumstances surrounding the negotiation were not in your favor.

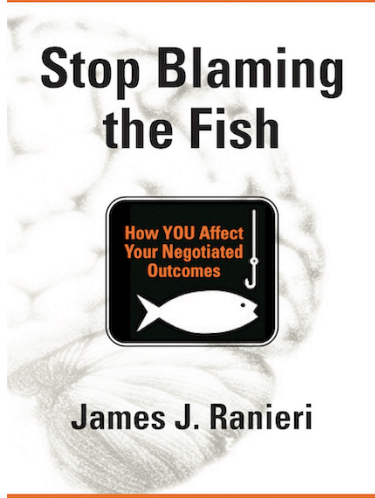
Some people make these excuses because they are either not comfortable with or do not understand how to negotiate. On the flip side, bully negotiators face a completely different set of problems as a

consequence of their negotiating style. They may question, why don't people trust me? Why doesn't anyone help me when I need help? Why is he waiting so long to get back at me? When they find themselves on the short end of the stick they rationalize by saying, "sometimes you get the dog and sometimes the dog gets you." In either case, you rarely, if ever, examine why negotiations turn out the way they do.

So let's start with YOU. Why aren't you the best negotiator you can be? Do you tend to give in too easily or push too hard? Is maintaining a good relationship more important than getting a better deal, or the converse? Do you avoid negotiating situations or seek them out? Do people tend to take advantage of you or avoid dealing with you? Does your empathy for others or lack of it get in the way of getting what you need? Do you approach living from a perspective of scarcity or plenty?

The core messages in this book are "know thyself" and "you are responsible for what happens to you." A negotiation usually gives you three moving parts to deal with; yourself, the counterpart and the situation. Knowing yourself and taking responsibility is important and it's worth diagnosing your overlearned responses. Understanding yourself gives rise to understanding your counterpart. Negotiating situations are driven by environment in the search to find common ground. *Stop Blaming the Fish* is a focused look at how YOU affect our negotiated outcomes, not others, not tricks and ploys, not theories, not tactics or mind games.

Here's what lies ahead. This book will both start and end with you. You will examine your overlearned responses and your comfort zone. Next, you will take a deep dive into what drives perceptions and understand different styles that you will encounter when you negotiate with a counterpart. You will become aware of your default personality traits (and the default traits of others) and assess if they are assets or liabilities. You will evaluate yourself along the continuums of five separate personality styles. Finally, based on your personal needs, you'll develop a tailored game plan of what YOU can specifically do to improve your negotiated results. I hope you find *Stop Blaming the Fish* enlightening. If you're usually not happy with your negotiated results, it's time to take control and Stop Blaming the Fish.



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