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“Who made the mistake?”
“Who missed the deadline?”
“Who dropped the ball?”

Although it may seem like these questions are legit, especially since practically anything that can go wrong is often because of someone’s negligence or ignorance, what these questions really seek is a scapegoat, someone to blame.

I’ve done it before--pointed a finger in any direction other than at myself. It always seemed justified but it did little to improve the situation at hand. I’ve indirectly contributed to many failures in my organization because I wasted time blaming instead of solving or helping. Even if I didn’t know who to blame, I’d make sure I wasn’t blamed. But eventually I learned that “fault” didn’t matter as much as “action.” Once something has gone awry, regardless whose fault it is, action needs to be

Don’t ask “Who?”

taken by someone to fix it. The time to discuss who, what, when, where, and why is after the fire has been put out. And after-action reports and lessons-learned discussions can unveil measures to hopefully prevent the same or similar mistake from happening again.

From the smallest group to the largest corporation, from the lowest rung on the ladder to the highest office in the land, there’s an epidemic of blame going on, and no one seems immune. Here’s a typical Circle of Blame that permeates our society:

*The CEO blames a vice president.
The vice president blames a manager.
The manager blames an employee.
The employee blames a customer. The customer blames the government. The government blames the politicians.
The politicians blame the schools. The schools blame the parents. The parents blame the children. The children blame dad. Dad blames mom. Mom blames her*

boss. Her boss blames the vice president. The vice president blames the CEO.

Blame and “whodunit” questions solve nothing. They create fear, destroy creativity, and build walls. Instead of brainstorming and working together to get things done, we blame-storm and accomplish nothing. We will never reach our full potential until we stop blaming each other and start practicing personal accountability.

So instead of asking “Who,” try prefacing your questions with the words “What” or “How.” Try asking:

“What can I do today to solve the problem?”

“How can I help move the project forward?”

“What action can I take to ‘own’ the situation?”

When we ask these types of questions, we can break the Circle of Blame and get things done.

~ The End ~