

## The Responsible Choice

By Kim Freedman

How many times have you heard someone say something like this?

“He really knows how to push my buttons.”

“She made me so angry!”

“They hurt my feelings.”

“There’s nothing I can do about it.”

All of these comments have something in common. They are all designed to absolve the speaker of responsibility for his or her own feelings, actions, or inactions. In essence, the person is saying, “I’m a powerless victim of circumstances.”

We sometimes forget that we have the ability to CHOOSE our reaction to every situation. As Stephen Covey so clearly illustrates in his book, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, responsibility is the *ability* to choose a *response*.

### RESPONSE → ABILITY

Many of us react to specific situations based on conditioning or habit. Just like in Pavlov’s famous experiments with dogs, we are presented with a situation—the stimulus—and we react with our response, in the same manner again and again without stopping to think about it.

### STIMULUS → RESPONSE

Even when that conditioned response is detrimental to our personal health and well-being, we continue to do it anyway, out of habit. For example, if someone criticizes me, my conditioned response may be to eat a pint of Ben and Jerry’s ice cream. It will soothe my wounded ego, and I can always blame the other person for making me gain a couple of pounds.

Instead, I should remind myself that between stimulus and response is the freedom to choose.

### FREEDOM TO CHOOSE



I made a choice to eat the ice cream. And, by eating the ice cream, I also choose the consequence of gaining weight.

When you hear people say they don't have a choice, what they are really saying is that they don't like the consequence of making a different choice. For example, someone may say, "I have to get up every morning and go to work. I have no choice because I have to feed myself and my family." But, everyone has choices. You could quit your job and choose not to work for pay, but the consequence of starvation is not too appealing. So, you may choose to go to work.

We cannot control what happens around us, but we have complete control over how we respond to the circumstances that we find ourselves in and the events that occur in our lives. Years ago, I really disliked the way my boss managed the department that I worked in. I felt that if she would just change, I could be happy in my job. I wasted a lot of time and energy being frustrated over the things she did and did not do, until I realized I was 100 percent responsible for my own misery. I was focusing on something I had no control over—namely, her behavior. Once I had that 'ah-ha' moment, I had a new choice to make. I could choose to accept the situation and be happy doing the work, or I could look for a new job (and a new boss). In the end, I did both. I changed my attitude about my current situation and eventually found a new job.

The choice is yours – remain a victim of circumstances or reclaim your power to make conscious choices. I think this quote by Dr. Denis Waitley sums it up nicely:

*"A sign of wisdom and maturity is when you come to terms with the realization that your decisions cause your rewards and consequences. You are responsible for your life, and your ultimate success depends on the choices you make."*

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Kim Freedman, President of [Catalyst Leadership Coaching, LLC](#), uses customized training programs and one-on-one coaching to help businesses develop effective leaders and productive teams. She also offers personal coaching to professionals who want to achieve their goals and have more time, energy, and money in the process.

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