

# But It's Not My Fault

You know, I always enjoy an opportunity to learn a life lesson from an everyday occurrence. Last week I was presented with a beauty. Let me set the scene. Last week, a client and I had finished discussions over coffee in a rather nice establishment overlooking the river where we could watch the comings and goings of the boats and ferries while we discussed business. I paid the bill and being a diligent record keeper, politely asked for a receipt. The conversation went something like this.

Me: "May I have a receipt please?"

Waitress " I don't think so, the EFT machine is just about out of paper"

Me: " But, I need one and I'm pretty sure that by law you're supposed to give me one."

Waitress: ( a bit miffed that I had not taken no for an answer went on "Well let me try, and then when the machine failed to produce the piece of paper and almost with a told you so air in her voice " No can't give you a receipt."

Me, with a question I learned while surviving the Middle East " Then what should we do"

The waitress, now getting a little steamed replied "You need a receipt for only \$10.40 . It's not my fault, the stationery people won't deliver the paper, I have to go and get them.

Me "That's okay then don't" or something like that.

I suddenly noticed that my client, let's call him Luke; because that's his name, was quite enjoying this exchange. As I left the counter, he stepped up. I didn't realise that Luke is a grumpy old man in the making. After

a bit of discussion between Luke and the now thoroughly unhappy waitress she promised to deliver the receipt to his office, a few doors up the road.

As we enjoyed the afternoon sun walking back to his office we discussed what had just happened. We agreed that it was our job to maintain service standards and let people know when they weren't up to an acceptable level; that of course being the true role of grumpy old men.

Afterwards, I thought more about the incident and remembered how quick the waitress had been to tell me why it wasn't her fault rather than think about how to solve the problem. And this is the real concern that I have in our broader society. Too often we are quick to seek out others to blame to declare that "it's not my fault" rather than step up and be part of the solution.

I put this experience together with a quality question that a good friend recently asked me. She enquired "Why is it that people who like living on boats are often the same people who like living on or working small rural properties. As an old army instructor used to say "good question well asked".

The answer came pretty quickly to me. People who survive and thrive on boats or on the land are resourceful and they enjoy the challenge of self-sufficiency.



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To me, self-sufficiency is at the top of the self-management tree. Let's think about it this way. First of all comes self-responsibility. This means, taking responsibility for what happens around you, looking for solutions rather than someone to blame.

Next we've got self-accountability, a state where we hold ourselves to account for our actions and the situations that we find ourselves in. We assess our own performance and learn from what we discover.

The third level is self-reliability. This is what's required when things get tough. Could you rely on yourself to go forward on the pitching deck of a yacht and release a fouled line? Would you rely on yourself to do this in a thirty knot wind on a pitch black night? Finally there is self-sufficiency, getting to a point where we can sustain ourselves, this might be physically, or mentally, or emotionally.

This might all sound a bit theoretical so let me put it in some real world terms. If our waitress friend had been self-responsible she would have apologised for the situation and perhaps thought of a way to meet the customers. If she was self-accountable she would have reflected on what had happened after the event and thought of ways to improve herself and the systems she was using. A self-reliant person would have realised that they had a range of options to deal with the situation and offered a solution to me. Finally, the self-sufficient waitress would have realised what was going occur and taken action to prevent it happening in the first place.

It might be interesting sometime to ask yourself where you sit on the self-management ladder, although if you are somewhere towards the top, I'm sure you already do this.

I can't wait for my next cup of coffee with Luke, I'm taking him to this really ordinary cafe I know with a really surly but unsuspecting waitress.

Enjoy the ride