

## It's Your Choice

*Choice Therapy: A New Psychology of Personal Freedom* (published 1998) by Dr. William Glasser, an internationally recognized psychiatrist, presents the theory that we all choose how we behave and that our control is limited to our own behavior vs trying to control another's behavior.

As man's most important need is love and belonging, he wants to do everything in his power to further closeness and connectedness in his relationships. When this goal is not attained, and, thus, he feels alone or rejected, he becomes dissatisfied by his relationships. Quite often, rather than looking inside himself and recognizing that his own choice of behaviors may have caused the deterioration of the relationship, he looks externally to place blame on another or makes himself a victim by blaming the circumstances in which he finds himself.

Glasser's theory goes on to state that there are *seven caring habits* that will foster good relationships and *seven deadly habits*, which are detrimental to relationships. The deadly habits are aptly named, for their usage will eventually lead to the destruction of a relationship.

<b>SEVEN CARING HABITS</b>	<b>SEVEN DEADLY HABITS</b>
Supporting	Criticizing
Encouraging	Blaming
Listening	Complaining
Accepting	Nagging
Trusting	Threatening
Respecting	Punishing
Negotiating Differences	Bribing, rewarding to control

Dr. William Glasser

As a result of falling prey to the *seven deadly habits* of criticizing, blaming, complaining, nagging, threatening, punishing, and bribing, and generally trying to get your partner to do what you want him/her to do, individuals push each other further apart, which results in a disconnection.

This disconnection is at the root of many of the emotional problems we encounter during our lifetime. As we become more disconnected, our basic need for love and connectedness moves further away from us, and we become unhappy, depressed, mad, sad – a whirlpool of negativity from which it is difficult to extricate oneself. This leads to more external blame, for people have a hard time seeing it is their choice to feel a certain way.

A person can just as easily choose to be positive about a situation, rather than negative. It is all in one's perspective.

The bottom line is that we each have a CHOICE on how we respond to our circumstances *and* a choice on how we behave towards our partner. It is greatly influenced by our perspective, for it is possible to consider the same situation good or bad. It is the individual who places the emotional tag on the circumstance.

Glasser contends that having at least one close and satisfying relationship is imperative to our mental, physical and emotional health. It is when we are unable to get along with the important people in our lives that our ability to cope in other areas of our life deteriorates too.

When we are frustrated by a relationship, we may tend to revert to anger. In this anger, we might lash out and emotionally hurt a partner. In a continuous downward cycle, this anger saddens and depresses us – actually immobilizing us so we cannot act on our feelings (good or bad ones). Now, we do not have enough energy -- even to be angry -- because the depression is zapping our strength. We then blame our depression (and our partner) for our inaction. We are looking outside of ourselves to find an external reason for the predicament in which we find ourselves. In truth, we have *chosen* to act in this fashion and created our own mess.

Moreover, when we are sad, or suffering, we are, in essence, “asking” our friends and family to reach out to us – without really having to come out and beg for attention. The result is the same, though. We have *chosen* to cut ourselves off from the most important love relationship in our life, and, in our need for connectedness, we search for some other way to get “love”, which is calling attention to oneself by a suffering attitude.

We could just as easily choose not to suffer and decide to act in ways to repair the relationship. We could take responsibility, as well as step out of the fear of rejection by reaching out to a partner. In other words, we could use the *seven caring habits* of supporting, encouraging, listening, accepting, trusting, respecting, and negotiating differences.

Suffering or depression is sometimes chosen as an easier route because it gets one off the hook to do the hard work necessary to have a healthy and successful relationship. This hard work includes being courageous; being emotionally honest; not playing games; realizing and accepting one can only be in control of oneself and not his/her partner; discontinuing the jockeying for position with a partner in a power struggle; and subordinating some individual wants and desires for the greater good of the relationship.

These are not easy feats to accomplish, although doable if both partners agree to work towards the goal of having a great relationship. The choice is yours.