

Taking Responsibility

By Laoshi Laurince McElroy

I never know the next place where I'm going to discover a new *Temple Story* or other tool to incorporate into my classes. A version of the following contemporary parable crossed my path while I was taking a training class on the Sandler approach to sales:

A reporter was working on a human interest story about twins when he found a story within the story. A tale crossed his desk of a pair of twins whose lives had taken two very different paths. He hunted the pair down. One had become the CEO of a multinational corporation. The other was homeless and struggling with alcoholism and drug addiction.



The reporter interviewed the one brother in his office and the other on the street. He began both interviews with same question: If you were to boil the source of your life story down to one thing, what would that thing be? To his surprise, both brothers answered the question in exactly the same way.

"My father was an alcoholic; what else was I supposed to do?"

Each of the brothers came out of the same crucible. One rose. One fell. Although an argument could be made that there would've been many factors bringing their separate journeys to where they now are, I think at the foundation of both is how they viewed their own responsibility.

When I lead Water Tiger's approach to *Oigong Hand Exercises* and identify each digit as we close and open them individually for *Flying Finger Waves*, I sometimes call the index finger "the pointer ... the finger of blame". I usually follow that moniker with the observation that it is only when the finger is closed that the blame is pointing where it really belongs — toward yourself. If you know our *Temple Story Look into the Mirror of the World*, you probably remember the last line: "I carry the mirror so that, in troubled times, I am able to show myself the source of my problems — and the solution."

We can be quick to look outside ourselves for the reasons things are as they are. Admittedly, there are things we cannot control — the weather, the shifts of the tides, time, the family into which we are born, etc. But, we can control how we live under those uncontrollable circumstances.

As I was facilitating a seminar last year and talking about stress, I used a standard phrase: Stress is a choice. One of the participants disagreed and ran down a list of things that she believed cause stress. The list included such things as work, family, bills, etc. I pointed out that those are, indeed, things over which we may not have much control, but I also pointed out that how we react to them is our choice. Stressors are not stress. Held alone, a stressor is nothing more than the state of affairs. It is what we do when we meet a given state of affairs that may or may not lead to all stress can bring into our lives.

The same can be said when we meet with a noise, odor, or other unplanned addition to our play on or off the mat. As many of you know, my standard response to a student who has said that something has distracted them goes something like this: "Did it distract you; or, did you allow it to distract you?" It's usually such simple truths that prick us the hardest. As a result, my question is usually met with a look that reads: "Laoshi is just being Laoshi." That reaction is a deflection. Just as it is with stressors, we need to take responsibility for those things that might be distracters.

Before moving to Long Island, I worked for a now defunct elearning company, Quester IT. Part of Quester's training approach for customer service representatives was based on an understanding of how language can change our perspective. When I am mindful and speak of action starting with "me" and things that "I" will do, it carries far more weight not only with the person with whom I am speaking, but also with me. When I speak of action starting with "us" or "them" and things that "we" or "they" will do, the opposite is true. People who want to shift responsibility will separate themselves from the equation. In doing so, nothing is ever their fault. This might happen when someone wants to wash their hands of a credit that isn't processed, or it might happen when someone doesn't want to admit their focus was not what it should be when that guy wearing the orange jumpsuit and talking loudly on his mobile phone walked by the studio's storefront.

We can always find another "other" — someone or something outside ourselves — on which to place the blame. He can always make you angry. She can always make you eat too much. There can always be not enough time. The phone can always ring. Traffic can always be heavy. It can always be too cold — or too hot. The neighbors can always be too noisy — or nosey. The weekend can always be too short. Vacation can always be just around the corner. There's always going to be next week.

It's on you to take responsibility for yourself. No one else and nothing else can do it for you. Only you.

