

Excuses

"It doesn't matter how good the excuse is -- it still means you're not getting something done." -- Anonymous

It seems to be the fashion over the last 50 years or so to make excuses. I'm pretty sure my parents' generation (the depression-era kids) didn't make many excuses -- they just sucked it up, tried to do what's right, and kept working. I doubt many people in generations earlier than that made many excuses -- they didn't have the luxury; they were too busy trying to survive.

Of course, if you believe the Bible and Bill Cosby, the first excuses were made by Adam in the Garden of Eden -- he tried to blame everything on Eve.

But what is it about later generations that make us think we have the absolute right to make excuses. From the politicians' favorite explanation/excuse, "Mistakes were made," to the favorite excuse of wayward sports figures ("I've got an untreated sex addiction"), they all start to sound like the excuse commonly given by the three-year-old: "I don't know why I did it -- I just did."

In fact, it seems to be the tendency of many people nowadays to make an excuse, rather than take responsibility for their actions. Why do they do this? They think it's easier.

After all, it's much easier to use the old "the dog ate my homework" excuse than it is to actually do the homework. Or at least, it's easier for the first time or two. Then, we fall behind, stop learning, stop growing, and people start to not believe in us or our abilities.

In other words, by using excuses all the time, we stop contributing, and start becoming more and more of a laughingstock.

What does this kind of thing do to our society? Pretty soon, we're using the old Flip Wilson line, "The Devil made me do it," in some sort of attempt to absolve ourselves of any responsibility. Some cultures swathe females in cloth from head to toe, just so the men won't take a chance of seeing an exposed cheek (on her face) and plunge themselves into endless depravity. Rather than controlling themselves, they blame it all on some animal urge that they have no power over.

Other people blame everything bad that happens in their life on God, the Devil, Congress, Medicare, right-wingers, left-wingers, centrists, auto manufacturers,

the president, the AFL-CIO, and the AARP.

In fact, many people blame everything bad that happens in their life on everyone and everything else -- except the person in the mirror.

They make excuses.

What happens?

They wind up excusing themselves out of life. When those last breaths are taken and the person's life passes before their eyes, they find that they traded a bunch of excuses for a mere shadow of what might have been a full-fledged, magnificent life.

They find in those last moments that stepping up to the plate and taking a swing at the challenges in life may have caused a failure now or again, but after all, a life fully lived contains pain and happiness, glory and pain, failure and success. A life lived in the half-reality of shadow and excuse rarely takes on enough meaning to be more than just a mere thin shadow of "what-ifs" and "could have beens."

"Far better it is to dare mighty things, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those who neither enjoy much or suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat." said the former president Theodore Roosevelt. I have to wonder what Teddy would have thought about some of the people who have succeeded him in that position -- a few of them have made every excuse in the book.

But then that seems to be the times we live in.

Ability is gained largely through trial, practice, and the occasional error. We learn from our errors, patch up the weak areas, become better. As automobile drivers, we learned at a young age (most of us), and although we may have made some poor choices at that tender period, some of which involved blinking red lights in our rear-view mirror, we learned, grew, and become better -- for most of us, driving an automobile is now second nature -- we only think about it when something dangerous attracts our attention.

When we learned to walk as a child, we fell. Few of us were skilled enough to walk the first time we stood up on two legs. We fell a bit, were possibly bruised a bit -- and yet despite those setbacks, we didn't make excuses -- we took on the challenge and we learned to walk.

At some point, some of us decide it's better to work on "covering our butts" than it is to "get our butts in gear." With that decision, which is usually a path chosen by numerous times where we chose the easy way over the challenging way, we

soon dedicate our lives to "just getting by."

And as a result, that's all we get. We just get by.

The great athlete chooses the challenge. The leader refuses to make excuses. The great among us, with their superior life, choose to deliver results, not excuses.

If we wish to have a superior life, we must also choose that path -- results, not excuses; growth, not stagnation (no, "stagnation" is not a strip club), and life, not a shadowy half-life never fully lived.

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