

# Changing the Blame Game

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The 1970s were described famously by novelist Tom Wolfe as the “Me Decade” in a 1976 article in *New York Magazine*. If I were asked to pin a label on the period we live in today, I would call this the “Who? Me!?” decade.

We are living, it seems, in a time of unparalleled obsession with demons and villains on whom we place all blame for whatever we don’t like about our current lot in life or our world at large. We rant about the President (current or recent past, depending on your political persuasion), the Congress, and Washington in general. Some blame Big Government, while others rail against Big Business. We find fault with our schools, our police, and just about anyone who doesn’t think as we do.

Don’t misunderstand. I get it. At this point, nearly all our major institutions are failing to deliver a workable way forward. But, just how much is all this ranting and raving changing the status quo? And what are anger, fear, and frustration doing to each of us?

I call it the “Who? Me!?” decade, because our personal role seems to be the last thing we consider. Yet, our own actions are really the only thing we control. Those who recite the serenity prayer know about distinguishing things we control from things we do not. Personally, I recall the words of Mahatma Gandhi: “You must be the change you want to see in the world.” It’s taken me a half century plus of living, but I now understand my energy is always best used doing things I can to further causes I care about and believe in. Energy spent telling others what they need to do is wasted. Showing them, on the other hand, produces results you will never fully know. Ponder for a moment the miracle of changing a world of 7 billion people in some meaningful way – or just changing a nation of 300+ million. It’s unimaginable. And yet, you can change yourself in some important, lasting way this instant.

Imagine if 7 billion people realized that! So many things we consider impossible are so only because of what we believe others are not willing to do? Be willing.

Sure, our system of governing needs changing in Washington. Our notions of an economy free from interference but fair for all stands in stark contrast to what we have created. But, we do not change these things by carrying signs, marching, camping in parks, or shouting angrily from afar about how others need to change. We change the world by changing ourselves.

If safer, healthier food is your thing (it’s one of mine), then you don’t change that by protesting the corporate conglomerates of our industrialized agriculture industry. You change it by finding good sources of healthful, locally grown, organic food. You go a little further and sometimes pay a little more to support that local farmer selling his wares at a farmers market nearby or the small market down the street.

If you think society needs more civility, make it more civil. Find someone with very different views, and find out why. Find out also what you have in common, which is always more than you ever imagined.

If you think children deserve more and better places to play, you can complain to your county about the lack of funding. Or, you can borrow a page from Nike, like a determined bunch of folks in Porterdale, and “Just Do It.” This past weekend, Mayor Arline Chapman, City Council Members, city staff, and volunteers from the community and local churches installed three “pocket parks” around the city, complete with landscaping, borders, mulch, and playground equipment. That same spirit is driving an all-volunteer public library with donated books, a community garden, a farmers market, and grand plans for a Yellow River Park begun under former Mayor Bobby Hamby.

I took a picture of one pocket park and posted it to Facebook Wednesday evening. Within hours, dozens of friends had liked or shared the photo. That’s another secret to being the change you want to see in the world. Don’t waste time finding and chastising those not doing as you think they should. Instead, put your considerable positive energy and the power of your personality into finding and liking the heck out of things you believe move us in the right direction. It may feel insignificant at the time, but you might just realize someday you changed the world.

“Who? Me!?”

Heck yeah. You!

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