

#99: Leadership vs. Personal Responsibility



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Marissa McKool, MPH

[Redefining Rest for Public Health Professionals Podcast
with Marissa McKool, MPH](#)

#99: Leadership vs. Personal Responsibility

Hey you all, I'm Marissa McKool, and you're listening to the *Redefining Rest Podcast for Public Health Professionals*. Here we believe rest is your right. You don't have to earn it, you just have to learn how to take it and I'm going to teach you. Ready? Come along.

Hello, friends. I'm so glad you're here. Today's episode is going to be really helpful for those of you who supervise staff whether you have a team of 10 or one staff, whether you supervise mid-career professionals or undergrad interns. And if you don't supervise staff and maybe even never want to, I promise this episode will still help you. Because leadership responsibility is more than when you manage another person. It can be when you're volunteering at an organization or charged with putting together an event or maybe you volunteer to lead a committee.

It's so much more than just managing staff. But I do want to preface this episode by saying, if you have not listened to episode 97, Taking Responsibility for your Life then you really need to go back and listen to that first. I don't often say this unless it's really necessary and it really is for this episode. If you don't, this episode won't really make complete sense and you won't get the most out of it. So if you haven't listened to that I would pause this, go back to listen to that first and then come back.

Often in my coaching program here is what ends up happening with the people I coach who do manage staff. So the first month of the program they really dive deep and we coach and they learn that their thoughts create their feelings, not their partner, not their calendar, not technology, not grants, not funding. And they really start to grasp that and take responsibility for how they feel at work and their own actions that stem from that feeling and the results they're creating for themselves.

Then something comes up with their direct, maybe they asked their staff to do something and they did not follow through, or their direct were supposed to get a draft done by Friday and it wasn't done in time. Perhaps they gave

#99: Leadership vs. Personal Responsibility

them feedback on a manuscript and the staff didn't incorporate all the edits. And in the coaching session you get confused. You say things like, "Well, I know my thoughts cause my feelings so I'm just upset because of my thoughts. So I can't really do anything."

Or, "Well, my staff's results and actions are an outcome of their thinking, not me so what can I do?" And you conflate a number of things and get confused. And kind of what I see happening is a swing of the pendulum. You come into coaching thinking that your staff, other people cause your feelings. And then you learn deeply that isn't true. But then you swing to the other side and want to advocate all your responsibility as a leader and say that you don't know how else to do it because everyone's thoughts cause their own feelings."

And whether or not you're actually in my coaching program you are properly conflating these two things. Number one, the actions, decisions and leadership responsibility you take on when your staff make a mistake or even when you make a mistake that affect your staff. And it doesn't just have to be mistakes. It can be any kind of thing that needs to change, missing something, delaying something, miscommunication, a number of things. And you conflate that with number two, your personal responsibility to manage your mind and emotional experience without making it mean negative things about yourself or the people you supervise.

So first let's recap personal responsibility. Yes, your feelings are created by your thoughts, your staff, what they did or didn't do, said or didn't say to you did not create your feelings. Let's say the situation is you ask your direct to draft a PowerPoint for your conference presentation by Wednesday. And midday Wednesday you reach out and say, "Hey, I haven't gotten it."

And they respond and say, "Oh, sorry, I didn't know you needed it this early, I'll get it to you by five." And then maybe they don't send it and they email you and say, "I'm running behind. I'll have to get it to you tomorrow", and

#99: Leadership vs. Personal Responsibility

they don't get it to you till midday Thursday. That is the circumstance. Those are the facts of what happened. Your thought or thoughts about it, what you think about that, that's your responsibility, your personal responsibility. Whatever you're thinking creates your feelings.

And managing your mind and what you think is managing your emotional responsibility, your personal responsibility. If you're thinking, oh my God, they don't know what they're doing, I'll just have to do this all myself, what a waste of time and you feel frustrated, that is your responsibility to manage, not by getting them to change their behavior, by you managing your mind, processing your emotions and choosing a more useful and helpful thought. That thought and feeling actually has nothing to do with your direct. You're creating unnecessary drama that isn't serving you and won't serve them or the work.

It doesn't serve them for you to think that they don't know what they're doing. It doesn't serve either of you, for you to take that work on your plate and remove that responsibility from their plate. On the flipside maybe instead you're thinking this is all my fault, I didn't give them enough time, they probably hate working with me and you feel guilty. That is your personal responsibility to manage. Manage your thoughts and feelings here, not by people pleasing or getting them to validate you, by managing your mind, processing your emotions and changing your thoughts.

That thought and feeling, thinking it's your fault, you didn't give them enough time, they probably hate you is not going to serve either of you or the work or the relationship. You have to clean up your thinking before you can cleanly, clearly and professionally execute your leadership responsibility. So what is leadership responsibility? It is the action and decisions you make to support your staff and the work based on your role. It's the guidance, feedback, correction you give.

#99: Leadership vs. Personal Responsibility

You cannot execute this leadership responsibility if you haven't taken personal responsibility for your thoughts and feelings. If you're thinking, oh my God, they don't know what they're doing, I'll just have to do this all myself, you will not be able to execute your leadership responsibility in a way that serves you, your staff and the work at the highest level because from that frustration you will probably miss or overlook important information. You probably won't take any responsibility yourself that maybe is yours to take, you will put it all on them.

You'll probably not listen very well or find a creative solution or give helpful feedback. On the flipside if you're thinking, well, this is all my fault, I didn't give them enough time, they probably hate working with me, you also won't be able to show up in your fullest capacity in your leadership role because you'll probably take on too much responsibility, some that isn't yours. You probably won't help the staff learn or grow or set clearer expectations.

When you clean that up you can actually take leadership responsibility, meaning you look at both where you could have done a better job as a supervisor to avoid the outcome and where your staff could have done a better job. And then decide based on that how to move forward. Maybe you realize, I didn't really give a clear time deadline. Moving forward I need to, I need to be clearer about that expectation. And you take responsibility for that.

But you can also tell your staff that they also have responsibility that if they're not clear, that they need to ask questions, they need to get more details. It's a two way street. when you have taken personal responsibility and are not taking the situation to mean anything about you or jump to conclusions and make it mean anything about your staff then you can get more information. You can ask the staff what they thought got in the way of their success. Did they need more notice? Was there another time pressing assignment you weren't aware of? Are they struggling to prioritize their work?

#99: Leadership vs. Personal Responsibility

And then you could ask yourself similar questions. Where could I have been more clear? Where did I not provide enough support? Where did I not provide detailed instructions? You can ask them and yourself these detailed questions. If you ask these questions without cleaning up your thinking, when you're in a place of making it mean all these negative things about them or you, you won't be able to calmly and clearly help, learn, take action and give feedback. You can still hold your staff accountable to their responsibilities in their role, their job duties, the expectations you set for them.

You can give feedback and direction and you can take responsibility for where maybe you made a mistake or fell short or didn't show up fully as their supervisor. The fact that everyone's actions and feelings are driven by their own thoughts doesn't change that. Actually learning that your thoughts cause your feelings can help you become a better supervisor and a better leader because instead of making mental drama about other people or yourself you can manage your mind and drop all of that. You can show up with a clear head, thinking about problem solving, listening, finding solutions.

Now, do not mistake what I am saying to mean that you cannot have emotions at work or as a leader. That is 100% not what I am saying. I did almost name this podcast episode, Leadership vs. Emotional Responsibility. But I decided not to because women are already socialized so much that they are 'too emotional' in the workplace or to lead which of course is not true. That's just the patriarchy and I don't want to add to that and so I want to be very clear that's not what I'm saying. You can absolutely have emotions at work or about your work. This is not about you becoming a robot.

You can feel disappointed that your staff didn't listen and made the same mistake twice. That is different than using that situation to think I'm such a terrible supervisor, I can't get them to change, what is wrong with me? I'm

#99: Leadership vs. Personal Responsibility

always going to fail. That line of thinking is not going to serve anyone. You need to take personal responsibility for that thinking. You can still feel disappointed and you can still have that emotion, that's totally okay. You can feel annoyed if your staff texts you a question when you are on sick leave or maternity leave or extended leave. You can absolutely have that feeling.

That is different than using that text message to think they totally disrespect me. They don't care about me. They can't do anything on their own. That line of thinking doesn't serve you as the leader and doesn't serve them or the work. This is really, really important because what you are thinking is going to drive how you show up as a leader. I can feel annoyed that my staff texted me, notice that annoyance. And I can do a couple of different things. I can decide, okay, I'm not going to respond while I'm processing this. I can decide, okay, I can respond while I'm feeling this annoyance because my mind is clean and I'm not making it mean a bunch of stuff about them or me.

Or I can notice, I'm having some thoughts here that aren't serving me, I need some time to clean that up before I respond. And I can decide to not respond at all or to respond later or to respond and say, "Hey, I'm on leave. I will not be responding to texts. Email me, I'll get back to you on my return." And set clear expectations. If I make it mean that they don't respect me and they don't care I won't be able to do that. I won't be able to set clear expectations. I won't be able to stand firm in them. I won't be able to respond in a way that serves me and them and the work.

Maybe I'll go start anger instead or respond angrily that won't serve anyone. I can feel disappointed that my staff made a mistake and still explain to them the third time how I want it done with disappointment and asking curious questions of why maybe they're struggling or really thinking critically, is this the right assignment for them. That's different than me

#99: Leadership vs. Personal Responsibility

having the thoughts and feeling insecure because I'm telling myself I'm a terrible boss, I can't do this, there must be something wrong with me.

Do you see the difference? One is making unnecessary mental drama out of it, making it mean a bunch of negative things about you or about them that doesn't serve anyone. And the other is allowing feelings but also deciding to take leadership responsibility, decide what to do from a clean, clear place that serves everyone the best you can. This is about taking that mental drama out of it, that unnecessary emotional suffering, not making it mean anything about anyone, cleaning that up so you can show up for yourself and for them and the work.

Okay, last thing, if you are a leader, if you are a supervisor who's overwhelmed, whether you're a new leader and just got into the role or a seasoned leader of five to 10 years, where you feel overwhelmed. I want to speak specifically to you. I know what it's like, I have been there. A lot of my clients are where you're at. Maybe you have meetings all day and you don't feel like you have enough time to get work done. Maybe you feel overwhelmed by the shifting position from being a staff to a supervisor.

Maybe you struggle supervising your staff and doing what I described on the podcast and setting expectations and being clear. If this is you I want you to schedule a consult for my coaching program. Program enrollment closes March 29th, that is coming right around the corner. That's the last day to sign up for a consult. I'm on a sabbatical, I'm off the whole month of April. So when you join we'll start the week of May 1st but you need to schedule a call now to secure a spot.

I want you to imagine if by fall before the next holiday season you feel confident about yourself as a leader, you're not shaken by challenges that come up or mistakes your staff make. Every week by Friday you know everything has gotten done, your team has done a stellar job and you can go into your weekend not worried about the work. You're ending most of

#99: Leadership vs. Personal Responsibility

your days, if not all, on time so you can have dinner with your family or make it to your workout class. You don't feel like you need to check emails on your day off or vacations because you know it's under control.

Imagine if that was your experience, this is what coaching can help you create. It will have such a tremendous impact not just on your work, on your skills, on your ability to supervise, but your relationships with your friends and your family and your personal goals of working out or eating healthier or starting a new hobby. Because when you have work stress, when you're struggling to feel confident at work, when you're overworking, that bleeds out into every area of your life.

Listen, when I was in the place that you're in and I was really struggling and I started coaching and changing things, what ended up happening was not only did my workload reduce, because I got better at delegating, I got clear with expectations, I got better at supporting my staff. My staff were much, much happier, their retention was so much better. We became kind of the all-star team that the other units looked at. People started coming to me asking for, "How do you say No? How do you set down boundaries? How do you be clear?" Because I got so good at it.

I was typically finishing my work before the end of the workday and going home early most days, taking a lot more time off and not worrying about it. And actually my quality of work was so much better that it was even recognized externally and I got a promotion and a \$10,000 raise. So this stuff matters, it's not frivolous. It really has a ripple effect across your life, in your career and personal life. So I want you to go to mckoolcoaching.com/coaching and sign up for a consult call before March 29th.

We'll start at the beginning of May and by fall, before the holiday season everything will be different. Alright you all, talk to you next week, bye everyone.

[Redefining Rest for Public Health Professionals Podcast](#)
[with Marissa McKool, MPH](#)

#99: Leadership vs. Personal Responsibility

If you found this episode helpful then you have to check out my coaching program where I provide you individualized support to create a life centered around rest. Head on over to mckoolcoaching.com, that's M-C-K-O-O-L coaching.com to learn more.