



By Dennis Reina, Ph.D., and Michelle Reina, Ph.D.

Gossip. Micromanagement. Rudeness. White lies. Hidden Agendas.

Sound familiar? We all hate working with people who engage in negative behaviors, so how is it that these behaviors remain so widespread in the workplace?

Our research tells us that 9 out of 10 people in the workplace experience trust breaking behaviors. However, no matter "what is done to them," they always have a choice as to how they respond. Those who assume the victim posture remain stuck and attached to making someone wrong. Unable to move on, they can make life challenging for others around them. Pervasive blaming, finger pointing, laziness, and general abdication of responsibility can take over and bring the whole team down. You need to first recognize the symptoms of victimhood in order to help others move from the victim posture to taking responsibility.

Workplaces everywhere are full of victims: people who hang on to a sense of having been wronged and act out their hurt through their daily actions and negative attitudes. Chances are, you work with some of these people. They are most likely the ones dragging down your team.

Everyone has the choice to remain a victim of broken trust or to take responsibility, see the lessons and opportunities, and create a different path to the future. When people remain a victim, they tend to blame their problems on someone else. In blaming others they abdicate responsibility, become apathetic, and eventually develop a sense of entitlement. In short, they can feel that they are "owed" something, and expect someone else to make them feel better.

While victims of someone else's behavior may not be responsible for what caused the breach of trust or betrayal, they are responsible for how they react to the situation. It is generally easy to identify those who embrace the victim posture by their negative behavior—they are often difficult to work with, manage, and even be around. Which of these columns best describes the behaviors of people you find frustrating?

Victim Posture	Responsible Posture
Feels entitled	Feels personally responsible
Apathetic	Takes initiative
Carries grudges	Constructively works through disagreements
Operates with hidden agendas	Open and transparent
Closed to new ideas	Curious and approachable
Acts out toward others	Treats people with respect
Goes through the motions	Empowers self and others
Engages in work-arounds	Deals with people directly
Does not take any risks	Takes appropriate risks
Gossips about others	Speaks with good purpose
Makes judgments	Seeks to understand

Once you are able to identify a colleague's victim posture, you can focus on helping the individual move past their pain to take responsibility. You can't force someone to move from the victim posture to taking responsibility; that is a choice each individual has to make for himself. What you can do is provide the support and perspective necessary to begin this process. Most often, people don't want to stay locked in their pain, but they are unsure how to move forward. They don't realize that part of the healing process involves taking responsibility for their reaction to the offending circumstance. The opportunity for them, for you, and for your entire team, lies in their conscious choice to take responsibility.

#### Here are 5 tips to help inspire others to take responsibility:

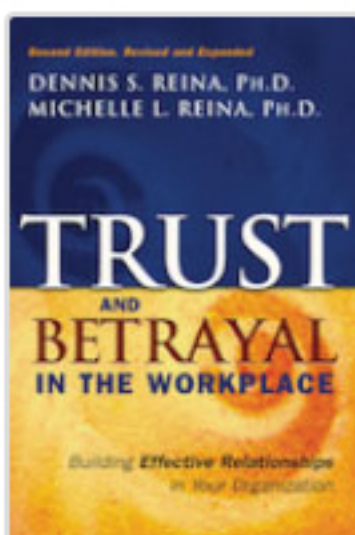
1. **Be Present:** Create a safe space to talk with them about what was "done to them" and the impact or cost to them. You can help them acknowledge their feelings and see the bigger picture surrounding the situation. Give them an opportunity to rethink their options and see new possibilities.
2. **Be Giving:** Provide perspective. Make it clear that you come from a desire to help them and that you do not have a hidden agenda. Share your concern that they are holding themselves back and impacting others.
3. **Be Proactive:** Help them see actions they can take to rebound from setbacks and adversity. Be an example by sharing how you moved through distrust to taking responsibility. Tell them a few of the lessons you have learned along the way about yourself and about relationships.
4. **Be Accountable:** Hold yourself to the same standard as everyone else. Deliver on the promises you make, and take ownership for your choices and decisions without blaming others.
5. **Be Strong:** Exemplify an unmistakable commitment to facing reality, no matter how challenging that may be. Catch yourself when you might slip into the victim posture.

By taking responsibility for their reactions, your colleagues will start to regain a sense of confidence and competence. They will reclaim their professional lives, and will become increasingly able to see possibility and opportunity rather than doom and gloom. A sense of willingness and collaboration will ultimately replace blaming and abdication.

#### What will you see then?

Initiative. Engagement. Honesty. Energy.

In short, you'll see results.



This article adapted from Trust and Betrayal in the Workplace: Building Effective Relationships in Your Organization, 2nd Ed.

Dennis S. Reina, Ph.D., and Michelle L. Reina, Ph.D., are pioneering experts on workplace trust and co-authors of Rebuilding Trust in the Workplace (Berrett-Koehler) and Trust and Betrayal in the Workplace (Berrett-Koehler). They are co-founders of the Reina Trust Building Institute, a global enterprise specializing in measuring, developing, and restoring workplace trust. Contact them at [reinatrustbuilding.com](http://reinatrustbuilding.com).