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THE CAUSE EFFECT

The distinction of Cause – Effect is one of the central tenets of *Whatever Life Throws* work and whilst on the surface it might seem incredibly simple our experience shows that this one little principle is often the single most powerful determinate of whether you will be successful in bringing about lasting, permanent change – be it personal, professional, social or organisational – or whether life (and other stuff) will get in the way.

Cause – Effect quite simply suggests that two ways that you can live your life – either ‘At Cause’ (fundamentally taking responsibility for whatever shows up in your life) or ‘At Effect’ (meaning you are literally living at the effect / being affected by external events, and that you feel you have very little control over the things that happen to you, or how you respond to them).

There, we told you it was simple.

Being ‘responsible’ is a different kettle of fish from ‘being at fault’ or ‘being to blame’. Indeed NLP is very light, curious and experimental in the tone of its approach to results – no finger-wagging or punitive tone here! When you really look hard at it, ‘responsibility’ actually means (and sounds like) ‘Response Ability’ – the ability to respond. It gives you more behavioural flexibility and choice and doesn’t keep you locked in the old victim-y paradigm that says you have to suffer your fate and there’s very little you can do about your circumstances. It puts you in the driving seat of your own life; and that’s a much more powerful and fun place to be than being ‘At Effect’.

Effect

No power to change.
No responsibility taken.
No control of outcome.
No choice.
Helplessness / Anger.
Reactive.
Excuses.
Failure.
Stuck.
Victim.

Cause

Power to change.
Responsible.
Control of outcome.
Choice.
Self respect.
Proactive.
Results.
Feedback / Learning.
Growth.
Survivor.

Ok, let's break it down into a classic example...

Someone Is Late For an Important Meeting – How Do They Excuse Their Lateness?

WHAT THEY SAY & DO.

At Effect

"The dog ate my homework."

"Somebody phoned me at the last minute."

"The car broke down."

"The train didn't show up."

"There was something super important I just had to do!"

Notes

They may even turn up for the meeting mentally rehearsing the excuse and how they're going to deliver it. (Come on, we've all done it!)

Of course all of the above circumstances may well be true. But the responsibility for being delayed is positioned well out of the person's control. They see it as somebody else's fault they're late.

There's no recognition that they make choices. Of course external events have an impact on us, but we have no power to change without recognising our own part in the outcome (i.e lateness). So yes, they got stuck in traffic, but they could also recognise that they left home late/ failed to factor in time for busy roads. Or prioritised answering the phone above being on time.

At Cause

"I apologise for being late."

"I take full responsibility. I could have left home earlier."

"I hope I haven't caused any inconvenience."

"I know if I leave home after 8.30 the traffic snarls up, and I left 8.45."

Notes

Let's face it, we can all be late, but someone who is truly at cause will recognise that they're responsible for their results – instead of blaming other people and circumstances.

This gives them the power to change their actions in the future and therefore get different results.

Our team's background in coaching different groups such as young people, people in debt and with financial challenges etc has shown us that a large proportion can end up spending most of their lives at the 'Effect' side of the equation. They like to avoid responsibility, devolve it onto other people or things (parents, teachers, carers, banks, the government, police, 'the system') and have results preferably delivered to them on a plate. It is our belief that it's only when a person fundamentally moves from effect to cause, that they can really begin to change their circumstances. The minute they are at cause, change will start to happen.

This has implications for a huge range of areas, including health. One of the core team members at Whatever Life Throws previously worked as a specialist Diabetes Nurse. She found that the diabetes patients who were 'At cause' or whom she managed to move to cause through coaching, were the best able to control their diabetes/ lose weight/ eat appropriately. The ones who struggled to get their diabetes under control/take insulin as prescribed/stick to the appropriate diets etc, were all at effect. They blamed their diabetes on some external factor, whether it was their parents giving them 'bad genes,' their GP for not picking it up sooner, McDonalds for making them fat etc. We are by no means saying that diabetes (or indeed any health condition) is the individual's 'fault'. It's more a question of looking at whether a person has more resources if they take responsibility for wherever they are right now, and how they can move forward no matter what. It is our experience that being at cause allows for this.

Life can, of course, throw all sorts of things at us personally. It's a question of how to deal with them powerfully (which is why we're called Whatever Life Throws!). The name came out of an experience in which our Lead Trainer and his partner were involved in a plane crash in the shark-infested Australian Ocean. A terrifying experience, and a prime opportunity to be at effect – 'not our responsibility that the plane's engine conked out/ ditching into the ocean/ servicing the plane' etc But they wanted to get their lives back to normal more than anything, so instead of suing they chose to be at cause: "What was there in this situation we could take responsibility for? Well in fact we chose to take the plane not the boat etc" Even while struggling to stay afloat in shark-infested waters they were using the NLP principle outlined above: "There's no such thing as failure, only feedback". So they joked about how useful a training story it would be, and what fun it would be to buy a brand new wardrobe (having just watched their suitcases sink to the bottom of the ocean). One way in which this principle or presupposition is articulated in NLP is:

**It is NOT WHAT happens to you that makes the difference;
it's what YOU DO with what happens to you.**

Outcome Frame

At 'Whatever Life Throws' we are consistently looking for ways to help someone move from effect to cause. One of the simplest ways we know is by using the following questions to move someone away from being 'at effect' of the problem and into a solution-oriented outcome frame (At Cause). We hope you find it useful.

PROBLEM VS OUTCOME

Think of a medium-level problem. Ask the following questions – first use the questions in the Problem Frame, then ask the questions in the Outcome Frame.

Problem Frame

Tell me about your problem?

.....
.....

How long has this been a problem for you?

.....

Whose fault is it?

.....

Who is to blame?

.....

What is the worst experience you have with this problem?

.....

Why haven't you been able to solve it yet?

.....

Outcome Frame

What do you actually want?

.....

How will you know when you've got it?

.....

What else in your life will improve once you have it?

.....

What resources do you already have that can help you reach this goal?

.....

What is something similar that you have already succeeded in doing?

.....

What is the next step?

.....

.....

Notice if there is any difference in your experience depending on which set of questions you use.

By *Neil Almond* and *Jo Worsley*.

Neil Almond, Head Trainer at *Whatever Life Throws*, is a well-respected and sought after coach, trainer and consultant. He has delivered projects for many of the UK's top organizations, facilitated sessions in Downing Street and has worked with industry leaders including Sir Richard Branson.



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What We're About

Whatever Life Throws is a team of highly experienced and qualified instructors and practitioners from a variety of fields and backgrounds. We are united by a passion: **to help you get from where you are today to where you want to be.**

Whether it's overcoming a particular problem, moving forward in your life or career or gaining the skills you need to help others, we're here whenever you need to tap into a wealth of empowering insights and practical techniques for change.

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