



Circumventing Excuses

Many people have written about the difference between reasons and excuses. By definition, a reason and an excuse are both very similar and both words imply an explanation or justification as a cause for a certain situation or circumstance. It is widely accepted, however, that there are differences between a reason and an excuse.

Question for Discussion: What do you think is the difference between a reason and an excuse?

Consider one way to break down reasons vs. excuses -

Reasons are commonly considered to be based on rational thought, sound logic, good sense and plausible judgement. Reasons should be connected with self-awareness and truth. A true reason therefore, has a definable and clear explanation between cause and effect. Reasons hold up when more research is done and facts are determined

- ***The reason why she could not enter the lunchroom was because they were serving PB & J sandwiches and she has a severe peanut allergy***
- ***The reason why I could not help you move was because I was in the hospital recovering from a broken leg on the day that you moved***

Excuses, like reasons involve a justification however the logic is often viewed as not as clear and often the purpose behind an excuse is to shift responsibility and accountability. When excuses are more closely examined, they do not hold up. Therefore when someone is making excuses and someone else challenges those excuses, often then the result is just more excuses

“He that is good for making excuses is seldom good for anything else.”

– Benjamin Franklin

Consider the following example:

“I was late to work today because of the traffic”

That statement in itself could be described as either a reason or an excuse on a surface level but to really know the difference, some more examination is necessary

Suppose there is **often** traffic on that person’s route to work, however the individual failed to leave enough time in his commute to account for the high likelihood of traffic. In that case, the above statement is more of an excuse as this person should have known better and accounted for the traffic. Ultimately it is the individual’s poor judgement behind the lateness in this case rather than the expected level of traffic itself

On the other hand, if this person’s route to work had an unexpected car accident causing severe, unusual delays, then the traffic is a legitimate reason and not an excuse. The truthful cause was the unexpected event of the accident blocking the road, and not the person.

The challenge with determining whether something is a reason or an excuse is that this process requires honest self-reflection which people may at times resist. Everyone rationalizes or justifies their behavior at one time or another. We all do it. However to really overcome being held back by excuses it is important that we practice being honest with ourselves. Once again, this is not easy for anyone and takes honest practice.



Group Activity: Confess or Encourage

What are some general examples of excuses that hold people back from the following goals? Brainstorm several for each goal. Then, if you can, try to **confess** or **encourage**:

- **Confess:** If you have the guts, share with the group any excuses that you may have made (or still make) for any of these goals - or:
- **Encourage:** If you have successfully achieved any of these goals in your life, share your secret for overcoming excuses in a way that may help others who may be struggling in that area

Goals

1. Quitting smoking
2. Working out and getting in good shape
3. Advancing in education and/or career
4. Saving money/getting out of debt
5. Getting and maintaining driver's license and suitable transportation
6. Pursuing an area of talent (art, music, sports)
7. Getting into a healthy relationship
8. Learning to finally successfully stabilize and/or manage ____ (Choose a mental health condition, bad habit or addiction)
9. Let go of or move on from _____ (fill in the blank with something negative from the past or present)
10. Finding happiness in life
11. Other? – *If there is time come up with a few more and discuss*

You can have
RESULTS
or
EXCUSES
not both

The origin of that saying is unclear as it has been attributed to various writers as well as bodybuilder/actor/politician Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Excuses are barriers to achieving positive results with any goal.

Take a few moments to discuss what that saying means to you personally



Overcoming Excuses



What is involved with overcoming excuses? Consider the following simple process for overcoming excuses:

1. Prepare yourself ahead of time for excuses. There are many common excuses people frequently make. Be ready for them:
 - **Think of a goal you want to achieve, then review the following list of common excuses. Check off any of them that you think that could come up for you:**
 - *There's not enough time (I'm too busy)*
 - *I don't have enough money*
 - *I'm not strong enough (physically or mentally)*
 - *I'm afraid (or anxious)*
 - *This is too hard*
 - *I'm not smart enough*
 - *I'm too old*
 - *What if I fail?*
 - *I've already tried before and I couldn't*
 - *It's not a good time right now*
 - *I'm not qualified (or skilled/talented/experienced enough)*
 - *There are too many things or stacked against me*
 - *I don't have enough people on my side to back me up*
 - *I don't even know how to begin*



2. Learn to identify when you are making excuses – *Catch yourself in the act.* (To be able to tell yourself “That’s just an excuse” can be a lot more motivating than having someone else tell you)
 - **Using an example from the last activity or come up with something you have not yet mentioned:**
 - **Pick one excuse you find yourself making that holds you back – Be honest with yourself.**

3. When you identify an excuse, reframe it as an obstacle that you can circumvent with persistent effort and careful strategizing. For example:
 - Excuse: *“I want to work out but I just don’t have time to get to the gym”*
 - Excuse reframed as obstacle to circumvent: *“Time is tight but I will have to move things around in order to get to the gym, like waking up earlier and watching less TV, but I can do it if I try”*

- **Now try to reframe your excuse that you came up with for #1 – Share it with the group**

4. Over time, learn to view circumstances that may hold you back as obstacles along the road toward your goal that you just need to drive around. If you were driving toward a destination and a road was closed, wouldn’t you just find another route and keep going? People who achieve goals may get delayed on occasion but they do not stop moving forward because of excuses – They just go around them

- **Closing discussion: One more time, what is your goal and how are going to stay determined to achieve that goal and get results – with no more excuses holding you back?**



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