Contrary to the commonly held notion that our culture is overly litigious, studies have shown that some injuries may go unnoticed, thus preventing people from addressing them. If the injury is perceived, but the injured party blames him or herself, they are unlikely to voice a grievance. The decision not to bring a claim may be due in part to the social value placed on competence, so that admitting we have been “taken” is seen as humiliating. If getting what we want is not seen as an option, or we fear that asking for what we want is selfish, or we are told that our expectations are too high, avoidance of conflict is the ultimate result.

Conflict can be paralyzing. We battle internally about whether the issues are important enough to risk a relationship or a job. We convince ourselves we are being kind in not wanting to cause pain. We don’t want to be seen as the “bad guy” or troublemaker. We are often oblivious to the undertow created by unresolved conflict. Withdrawal from conflict can mean failure to protect others who depend on us, failure to take responsibility or be accountable for our mistakes, and abdication of our human and civil rights.

The awareness of an injury is the first step in creating change. The awareness comes in the form of naming. To name the injury or injustice is to define our own experience. The next step is blaming. We attribute fault to a person or institution or event that has caused the injury. We allow ourselves to experience the anger and hurt. The final step is claiming. We ask for reparations to be made and for this not to occur in the future. Thus we have acted in our own behalf, claimed our experience, and worked to change the outcome. This is the nature of empowerment. Claiming may also bring the painful recognition that we have consciously or unconsciously, accepted and participated in our own oppression, and/or the oppression of others. Taking our share of responsibility is also part of empowerment.

NAMING
(experience)

BLAMING
(reaction)

CLAIMING
(understanding and responsibility)


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