Blaming others for your problems is a complete waste of time. When you do that, you don't learn anything.

You can't grow, and you can't mature. Thus, you can't make your life better.

In my three decades as a professor and clinical psychologist, I have learned that there are two fundamental attitudes toward life and its sorrows. Those with the first attitude blame the world. Those with the second ask what they could do differently.

Imagine a couple on the brink of divorce. They're hurt and angry. The unhappy, bitter husband recalls the terrible things his wife has done, and the reasons he can no longer live with her.

The harried and disillusioned wife, in turn, can describe all the ways her husband let her down. Each has a long list of necessary changes—for the other person.

Their prospects for reconciliation are grim. Why? Because other people aren't the problem. You're the problem. You can't change other people, but you can change yourself. But it's difficult. It takes courage to change, and it takes discipline. It's much easier—and much more gratifying to your basest desires—to blame someone else for your misery.

Consider the youthful activist, making a "statement" against the "corrupt" capitalist system by smashing in the storefront of a local business. What has he done, other than to bring harm to people who have nothing to do with his real problems?

The guilt, doubt and shame he will inevitably feel in consequence will have to be suppressed so his beliefs can remain unchanged. And that suppression will do nothing but foster his anger and alienation.

In the play "The Cocktail Party" by American-English poet T.S. Eliot, one of the characters is having a very hard time of it. She speaks of her profound unhappiness to her psychiatrist. She tells him that she hopes her suffering is all her own fault.

Taken aback, the psychiatrist asks why. Because, she tells him, if it's her fault, she can do something about it. If it's in the nature of the world, however, she's doomed. She can't change everything else. But she could change herself.

Now, there are people who seem to be consigned to a terrible fate. But most of us aren't. Most of us have a chance to make our lives better.

But how?

Start small. Ask yourself a few questions: Have you taken full advantage of the opportunities offered to you? Are you working to your fullest capacity at school or at work? Have you, in other words, set your own house in order?

If the answer is no, try this: stop doing what you know to be wrong. Stop today.

Don't waste time asking how you know that what you're doing is wrong.
Inopportune questioning can confuse without enlightening, and deflect you from action. You can know something is right or wrong without knowing why.
Start paying attention: Do you procrastinate, show up late, spend money you don't have, and drink more than you should?

It's not a matter of accepting some externally imposed morality. It's a dialogue with your own conscience. What are you doing that's wrong, from your own perspective? What could you put right—right now?

Get to work on time. Stop interrupting people. Make peace with your siblings and your parents. Diligently utilize everything you already have at hand. If you do those things, your life will improve. You'll become more peaceful, productive and desirable.

After some days, or weeks, or months of attentive effort, your mind will clear. Your life will become less tragic, and you will become more confident. You'll start seeing right from wrong more clearly. The path in front of you will shine more brightly. You'll stop getting in your own way. Instead of bringing trouble to yourself, your family, and your society, you'll be a positive and reliable force.

Your life will still be difficult. You'll still suffer. That's the price of being alive. But maybe you'll become strong enough to accept that burden, and in that fashion even come to act nobly, and with purpose.

The proper way to fix the world isn't to fix the world. There's no reason to assume that you're even up to such a task. But you can fix yourself. You'll do no one any harm by doing so.

And in that manner, at least, you will make the world a better place.

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