

What are YOU going to do about it?

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I went for a walk once with my oldest son. I had been doing a lot of walking as rehab for my leg and I asked him to join me, since we were the only ones at home at the time. It was a great walk, and we had a great talk. He asked me a lot of questions about nature, about business, about life, and about sports.

My oldest son is 10 years old and loves playing soccer, especially net. He is a good keeper. He was telling me about his dream of playing professionally one day. I found myself reminding him about school and the importance of life after his potential professional soccer career. Out of the blue, he said some very wise words. "Dad, I have to be sure I am ready to do something else, in case I get hurt before I retire and find out I can't play soccer anymore."

Suddenly I recalled so many athletes who were not ready to retire from their sport, but were forced to retire due to injury. They were not prepared financially-and more importantly, mentally-for a forced retirement. My son was essentially saying to me, "Dad, we can't control what happens to us, only what we do about what happens to us." Wise words from such a young man.

So...what are YOU going to do about it...whatever "it" is?

Whether we are talking about our personal lives or our communities, things happen that are beyond our control. We can't control if a meteor hits our house, or unprecedented weather causes flooding that devastates our community, or if we break our leg in an unfortunate boating accident, or if a large employer has to close its doors. We can't control whether we get cancer, or how tall we are, or if the sun will shine the day we want to have a picnic. We can't control the majority of what happens to us.

The same applies to our communities. We can't control the world price of oil, or whether national policies shut down an industry, or if another government fails to permit an infrastructure project. Complaining can be therapeutic at the beginning, but it is a complete waste of energy if it endures. It is like being caught in the rain on a nice walk: Instead of finding nearby shelter, building your own shelter, or running home, you stand there and complain about the rain while you get soaked. It's a waste of energy. It's not going to change your situation.

Too often we feel lost and helpless because our plans didn't turn out the way we had...well, planned. We didn't get to be a soccer player. We didn't get to walk in the sunshine. We didn't get to keep the same job in the same plant for our entire lives. Life didn't work out the way it was supposed to or the way we wanted. Failure happens when we stick with complaining and never move on. Success happens only when we get on with adapting.

Just like people, communities complain when circumstances change. They become upset when they lose their major employer or a major taxpayer. They complain when the world changes around them and it causes them grief. That's okay if it doesn't become permanent. Too often, however, it does. Complaining, claiming things aren't fair, and blaming circumstances and people becomes destructive when it moves from mere venting to an excuse, and it becomes an excuse when you don't take the next step of adapting.

In other words, the important question is never about how you got to where you are. It is never about how to stop the events you can't control. By definition they are out of your hands since you can't control them. The only question that really matters is: What are you going to do about it?

If you haven't moved on to that question and approached it with serious candor, you won't move from chronic complaining to being an owner of your destiny. If your community has experienced change and you haven't been able to adapt, if you seem to have fallen into the trap of complaining about a situation you can't control, try looking internally to see what you can do differently to change your circumstances. After all, that is all you can really control.

This syndicated content is provided by Doug Griffiths, best-selling author and chief community builder at 13 Ways, a company with a mission to push communities to face their challenges to find their unique path to success. For more information visit www.13ways.ca, or we can start the conversation at info@13ways.ca.