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Don't Blame the Government for America's Obesity

By Dale Reynolds

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Peter Jennings presented a report on Monday, December 8th regarding obesity in America. The show looked at the roles our government and agriculture play in our eating habits, as well as advertising (especially directed at children). The report blames the government for subsidizing corn to be fed to farm animals, as opposed to helping farmers produce more vegetables and fruit for human consumption. They also pointed out that advertising for "junk food" specifically designed to reach children is unethical.

It's good that Mr. Jennings pointed out the link between corn-fed animals and the misuse of antibiotics because many people don't understand this. Basically, he stated that farm animals must be fed antibiotics because a corn-based diet is not what their bodies are designed for. And if you think about what cows eat when left out to graze, he's right. They eat greens, not corn. Other agricultural "cost-saving" practices also contribute to illness in animals. Although not mentioned on the show, overcrowding and confinement are major problems on large farms. When humans consume meat from animals whose food was laced with antibiotics, the humans often develop immunity to those drugs. This means that when people get sick, the drugs prescribed by the doctor might not work. So the duration and severity of your illness could be much worse as your doctor searches for a medication that will kill the disease. Obviously, depending on the severity of your condition, this could even result in death.

Peter Jennings went on to point out that feeding animals what they were meant to eat raises the cost of meat. He sees this as a positive thing, because maybe then people will eat less meat and more produce (and presumably lose weight). However, we must be careful about how the produce is raised as well. A recent article in a national magazine discussed a study comparing the nutrient content of vegetables and fruits raised with pesticides using traditional "mass production" farming techniques to organically produced counterparts. The mass produced foods were found to contain significantly less vitamins and minerals than organically raised produce. But organic produce is more expensive. So if we raise our fruits and veggies organically, and the cost goes up, will people really eat more produce and less meat?

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Paying farmers to produce more fruits and vegetables is not going to change American eating habits, because our eating habits are not constrained by the food supply. Our markets are not short on produce at all—it is quite abundant. The grocery stores are not going to allocate more space to the produce department just because the government subsidizes fruits and vegetables and makes them cheaper. Cheaper produce won't necessarily cause an increase in demand. Supply and demand rules: consumers must start buying more fruits and vegetables before the markets will expand the department. So what really needs to happen to stop the obesity epidemic in America? People need to change their eating habits!

The best reason to stop obesity is to improve health. And this has a bottom line as well. If people complain about the higher cost of eating healthy, they should really be looking at the long-term cost of being in ill health as they age. High blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes and cancer are all very

costly and all (though only some forms of cancer) are related to obesity. Blaming the government and farmers for raising the wrong foods, or raising animals the wrong way, doesn't solve the problem. People must start eating differently, and buying organic meats and produce, to save their health. The market will figure out how to respond!

Advertising junk food to kids is immoral. However, adults who eat properly set the right example and tend to have kids who eat healthy. As the TV segment pointed out, much of this advertising is aimed at children around 6 years of age. They don't do their own food shopping! They might ask their parents for sugary cereals and fast food, but the parents still have the ultimate control over what comes into the house. They can also exert at least some control over what kids eat at school and at friend's homes. Set a good example and teach children why healthy eating is important. They'll get the message. Overweight children are not getting that way on too much fruit! The wrong types of food are available to them, and that food is mostly provided by parents. It is NOT a coincidence! The "do as I say, not as I do" approach to parenting simply doesn't work. You must be a positive role model.

If farmers refused to raise fruits and vegetables at all, or if grocery stores refused to stock them, maybe we could shift the blame for obesity to the government and the agricultural system. But there is no shortage of healthy food in America! It is all a matter of PERSONAL CHOICE.

When Americans wake up and get concerned about their health, and stop trying to fix everything with yet another pill to pop every day, the obesity epidemic will be but a memory. Until then, if you want to know why America is fat, look at how we spend our food dollars. We vote with our money. Look at the choices we make every day!

Dale Reynolds is a weight loss counselor and author living in upstate New York. She has a book entitled "A Slim Book On Weighty Matters" which is available through her website, <http://www.slimdale.com>. She also has a free email newsletter on Weighty Matters.

The Blame Game!

By Jonathan R Taylor

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In talking with people many times, it's very evident that determinism is deeply imbedded in our present day culture. Too often I notice that people blame circumstances or others for their problems. This past election, I heard people in both political parties express the doom and gloom that would come if either of the two candidates were elected. I even heard that it was the candidates themselves who were going to be responsible for creating more jobs! As if the government manufactures jobs for people. The fact is that job growth happens when there is less government restriction. This kind of "blame game" mentality is becoming more prevalent than ever.

We've all played the blame game a time or two. The job we didn't get because the interviewer was out to get us, or the relationship that didn't work out because the other person had problems, and how about the business that failed because customers wouldn't pay on time or the bank wouldn't approve that loan. The fact is, we've all fallen into the trap of putting responsibility on others for the disappointments we've suffered in life. I'm not saying that we can control everything in life that happens to us. There are certainly circumstances that are often out of our control. These are just part of life's trials that God puts us through at times. What we do have, is control over how we react to those unfortunate events.

Dr. Stephen Covey in his excellent book, *The Eighth Habit*, says that part of the reason that people fall into the habit of blaming others is that don't want to face the fact that they are truly to blame for where they are in life. They would much rather "play the victim" in life. The truth is ,though, that until a person can honestly say "I am what I am" or "I am where I am because I chose to be here," they can never improve their current situation. It's time for us to take responsibility for our lives, no matter the situation we find ourselves in.

Jonathan R. Taylor, specializes in helping people in every stage of their lives to find more meaning and purpose in their work. He believes that to find that purpose and meaning, a person's interests, skills, passions, and goals must integrate seamlessly with their work. To get more great advice, subscribe to Jonathan's newsletter at www.careercalling.com!



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