

# How Cultivating An Internal Locus of Control Can Help You Succeed

In the United States today, it's fashionable to see ourselves as victims. Commentators on the far left will [tell you](#) that skin color traps people in poverty and that people cannot determine their own fate. Commentators on the far right will tell you that immigrants are stealing jobs and that there's nothing we can do about it. Both sets of voices tell us we're helpless victims. But cultivating a victim complex is lethal to our ability to achieve our goals and build the life we desire.

Fortunately, there's a better way: cultivating an internal locus of control. What is an internal locus of control? Put simply, it's the idea that you always have a choice about how you respond. The world might buffet us, our friends or family may even betray us, and our jobs may get automated; but no matter what, we can control our mindset and response. This is the anti-victimhood mindset.

Or as Viktor E. Frankl, a psychotherapist and survivor of Auschwitz concentration camp, puts it in his book [Man's Search For Meaning](#), "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

There are three immense benefits to cultivating an internal locus of control.

## 1. Making Better Decisions

An internal locus of control can help us stay calm and make better decisions. When our spouse says we need to talk or our

company announces a round of downsizing, it's tempting to panic. But panic leads to bad decisions. Panic and desperation blind us, giving us tunnel vision and preventing us from seeing opportunities or new ideas.

By contrast, people who cultivate an internal locus of control recognize that they are the captain of their own ship. Even when waters get rough, they know that their ultimate destination is up to them. This creates a sense of calm. When we're calm, we can see the whole picture and stay open to ideas and solutions that panic would blind us to. We can also choose our response from a place of measured grounding, rather than flailing around in a state of reactivity. This is one reason that people who cultivate an internal locus of control tend to have "better decision-making processes," as psychologist Mathias Sager [puts it](#).

## 2. Building a Better Inner Circle

Mark Johnson has been a [men's coach for over 20 years](#), and one pattern he's seen over and over with clients: like attracts like. We attract people into our lives, and especially our inner circles, who mirror us in key ways. If we cultivate an external locus of control, then we'll attract people who do the same. We'll be more likely to attract friends who panic at the first sign of problems, adding chaos to our lives rather than peace. We'll attract team members and employees who struggle to make sound decisions in the face of adversity.

Perhaps most importantly, we'll be more likely to attract a spouse who acts like a bull in a china shop, [magnifying relationship problems](#) rather than diminishing them. If our spouses have an external locus of control, they'll also be less likely to knuckle down and work on the relationship when things get rough. After all, if the success of our relationships is determined by forces outside of our control, what's the point in trying?

By contrast, if we cultivate an internal locus of control, we'll attract friends, employees, and a spouse with the same mindset. We'll attract a spouse who can stay calm even when a plan goes wrong or we're having a fight. People with an internal locus of control "feel confident in the face of challenges" and "often achieve greater success in the workplace," [according](#) to psychology teacher Kendra Cherry.

### 3. More Energy

The third benefit to cultivating an internal locus of control is that it can boost energy levels. When we trust ourselves to handle any problems that arise, we're less likely to panic when something goes wrong. This matters because panic—and reactivity in general—is an energy suck. Panic kicks our brains into a fight-or-flight response, flooding our system with adrenaline. We may feel like we have more energy in the moment (though this energy is likely to be misdirected), but we'll pay for it later. By contrast, staying calm helps us remain light and easy, focusing our scarce energy on essential tasks rather than burning it in mental flailing.

So how can we cultivate an internal locus of control? Accepting [responsibility](#) for our actions is the first step. By doing so, we are able to reclaim our lives and our ability to affect change in them. Rather than playing the blame game, we can remember that we are agents, [not victims](#). And beyond just complaining about problems, we can identify solutions. For instance, if there's a persistent source of stress, we can pinpoint the issue and implement a plan to eliminate it. Or if there's an area of our lives we want to improve, we can create a specific strategy.

Cultivating an internal locus of control isn't easy. It takes discipline, day-in and day-out effort to shape our minds, and a willingness to resist the siren song of victimhood. But in the long run, it does lead to greater success and fulfillment.

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[Julian Adorney](#) also contributed to this article.

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