

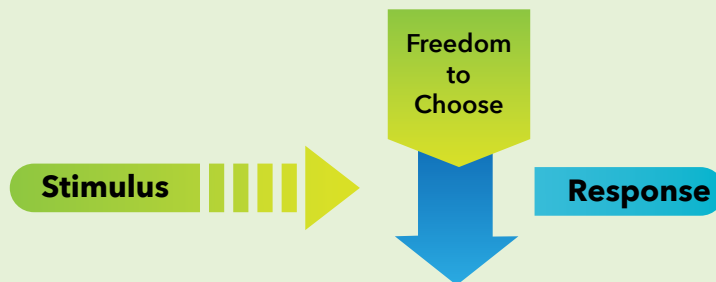
## COVID-19 cannot take away our freedom to choose

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In *Man's Search for Meaning*, Victor Frankl explains that, although Nazi captors could control his entire environment, only he could decide how it was going to affect him. Despite the external situation (stimulus), he had the freedom and power to choose his response (Fig. 1). He had response-ability, the ability to choose, the human freedom that no one can take away. This short bulletin explains how we can apply this concept during the COVID-19 crisis.

Figure 1. Our response to a situation can be reactive (A) or proactive (B)

a) Reactive Model



b) Proactive Model

As leaders, we can be proactive or reactive. Proactive leaders consciously choose their response-ability. Reactive people do not recognize that ability and are often affected by their physical environment, including what others might think about them. External conditions or stimuli control them, their thinking, feelings, and behaviour.

The behaviour of proactive people is the result of their own conscious choice,

based on their values and purpose. Proactive people are still influenced by external stimuli (physical, social, or psychological), but their self-awareness and self-management create a space between stimulus and response in which a choice can be made. In crisis situations, such as a pandemic, particularly a long-lasting one, we risk losing that freedom of choice and become reactive in our thinking, feelings, and actions. That in turn inhibits our creativity as the executive part of our brain, the pre-frontal cortex, is short circuited.

Reactivity and proactivity are often reflected in our language (Table 1). Reactive people seem to talk as if they are absolved from any response-ability, while proactive leaders use language that encourages self and others to look at other possibilities.

Reactive language can become self-fulfilling when people believe they are trapped in a particular paradigm or situation and then produce the evidence (in their mind) to support that belief. This increases a sense of inadequacy

Table 1. Proactive versus reactive language

| Proactive language  | Reactive language                       |
|---|---|
| What else is possible?  | There is nothing I can do.              |
| I control my own feelings and am curious as to why he behaves that way. | He makes me so angry.                   |
| I will...   | That's just the way I am.               |
| Where does the feeling of guilt come from and how do I deal with it?    | I can't get rid of my feeling of guilt. |

and helplessness and a feeling of being victimized, without control over one's life and destiny. As a result of reactive language and behaviour, people blame themselves or others for the situation and adopt accusing attitudes.

In contrast, proactive people subordinate those feelings to values and purpose, creating possibilities for action. It is important that we use proactive language, not only for ourselves, but also for those we work and interact with during this COVID-19 crisis. Only then will we continue to see creatively what else is possible.

How to discover what you can control, what you can influence, and what you should let go of is the content of bulletin 4.

If CSPL can help you in any way, please contact us.

BE KIND  
BE WELL AND STAY WELL  
DO GOOD  
TOGETHER WE CAN BEAT COVID-19

**Your CSPL**

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