

# A story that encourages self efficacy and internal locus of control

## Opinion

Having an Internal Locus of Control and Self Efficacy are the hallmarks of positive mental health. The Empty Rowboat is a story that shows how easily we blame others for our emotions, and the reality that our emotions come from us, not from outside us. I use this story with clients of all ages, especially teenagers, to help encourage self efficacy and an Internal Locus of Control. This in turn helps to enable them to be better able to be masters of themselves.

## The empty rowboat story

Imagine yourself on a perfect day rowing your rowboat on a beautiful river early in the morning. No one else is on the river but as you row along you notice, as you look backwards in the direction you are rowing, that there is another rowboat about one hundred yards away on the same side of the river as you. To avoid having to keep looking over your shoulder to monitor the other boat, you row all the way across the river to the opposite side. You are in a zone and are thoroughly enjoying being out on the river when all of a sudden the other boat hits you head on and you go tumbling out of your boat deep under water. As you are coming up to the surface toward the other boat, you are livid with anger. After all you purposely avoided this boat by going to the other side of the river. When you surface you put your hands on the side of the other boat, lift yourself up and you see that the other boat was empty! It was just drifting on the river with no one in it.

The first question to ask: **Where did your anger come from?** (At this point most people will say their anger came from the other boat. But as you question and/or explain that there is no one else on

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the river and boats don't have anger embedded in them, most realize that their anger came from them).

Now the last and much harder question: **If there were someone in the boat, then where would your anger have come from?** For some this is an aha moment as they realize that their anger comes from them whether or not there was someone in the boat. Others need a little more questioning before and if they come to realize that their anger still comes from them no matter who was on the river. Once they realize this, they are better able to master themselves and take whatever appropriate action may be needed.

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## Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.