

# Understanding our Roles, Rights, Responsibilities and Permissions

The greatest communication ability is to take in all of the communication offered by another person and to respond in an appropriate manner – appropriate by that person’s understanding of the world.

*Michael D McMaster*

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## Introduction

Each of us plays different roles at different times: parent, child, friend, customer, stranger, employer, employee and/or partner.

In each of those roles, we have certain rights as we might see them. For example, as a partner I feel I have the right to tell my partner what I would like us to work on to improve our relationship. Similarly, my partner has the right to also hear what I think is working great in our relationship.

Additionally, in each role we have certain responsibilities. As a parent, I may see my responsibilities to include providing shelter and food for my child, and also to provide advice from my life experience. I may also see it as my responsibility to teach my child about responsibility and support them to make their own decisions. Therefore, in return I may expect my child to take responsibility for their decisions.

Interwoven throughout all of this, we also ask for and grant permission to ourselves and others. This can be overt, meaning clearly expressed, or covert, meaning assumed. Sometimes covert permission is there because no one said we didn’t have permission whether we asked for permission or not. Assumptions can be a very dangerous thing.

The points and questions raised in this document are provided for the purpose of discussion and exploration. Although space has been provided in the exercises here, it may also be helpful to keep a journal to write your notes and thoughts as they come to you.

## Exercise

The first step of the exercise is to list all of the roles you feel you perform in all aspects of your life. For example: parent, child, student, manager, employee, friend, etc. Use the space below to list these roles.


Now, for each role, explore what you believe your rights and responsibilities are. For example, in the role of parent, what rights do you believe must be honoured by yourself and others in respect of that role? And what responsibilities do you have to yourself and others related to that role? A format for this has been provided below and on the next number of pages, or you could write this up in your journal.

<b>My Role:</b>	
<b>Rights</b>	<b>Responsibilities</b>

<b>My Role:</b>	
<b>Rights</b>	<b>Responsibilities</b>

My Role:	
Rights	Responsibilities

My Role:	
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<b>My Role:</b>	
<b>Rights</b>	<b>Responsibilities</b>

You may at this stage also want to look at some of the roles of individuals around you and central to your life. For example, if you are an employee, you may want to consider what the roles and responsibilities are of your boss as she/he might see them. You can use the same template as you did for yourself. This time please note the role description as "My boss" or "My kids".

As before, you can either use the fields in this workbook, or document your thoughts and observations in a separate journal.

<b>Role:</b>	
<b>Rights</b>	<b>Responsibilities</b>

Role:	
Rights	Responsibilities

Role:	
Rights	Responsibilities

Role:	
Rights	Responsibilities

<b>Role:</b>	
<b>Rights</b>	<b>Responsibilities</b>

This is an ideal time for some more in-depth analysis. When you compare how you see your roles, rights and responsibilities with the roles, rights and responsibilities of the key people in your life, consider the following questions. You may need to write your notes in a separate journal, or discuss your thoughts and feelings with your coach.

- How well do you believe you are upholding the responsibilities of any or all of your roles?

- Are you honouring and maintaining your rights for any or all of your roles?

- How are you communicating what you believe your rights are to others related to any or all of your roles?

- How are you sure that the responsibilities you think you have for a particular role are actually your responsibility? Have you checked in with others and confirmed it? Was this something that was negotiated, or have you assumed the responsibility? Is the responsibility better shared or delegated to someone else?

- How do you think others perceive you in your roles and how you uphold your rights and deliver on your responsibilities?

- When you consider what you believe the other roles around you are, and their rights and responsibilities, do you think there is any difference between what you perceive and what the other person feels about their own role? If so, what do you think is the basis for this difference? Do you have enough information? Have you discussed this with the other person? Are you making assumptions or judgements? Are those assumptions and judgements fair to the other person and to you?

- Do you believe that any of these other roles around you would appreciate you acknowledging them, their roles, rights and responsibilities, and how do you feel they would like that to occur?

- And how would you like them to do the same in return?

- Based on any of these questions so far, are there any changes in thinking or behaviour you'd like to commit to? Are there any specific actions you are willing to declare you'll do more of, less of or simply differently?

Finally, also take a look at what you do and do not have permission to do. Consider what permissions you are or are not giving to others. Then review the actual behaviour. Are you acting in ways without the permission of others? Are you assuming too much? Are you providing criticisms without being invited? How do you respond when others act without seeking your permissions?

From this analysis, you could quite easily be challenged to communicate more effectively and thoroughly with others regarding roles, rights and responsibilities. There may be a need to negotiate or re-negotiate. And there may be opportunities to both apologise and forgive.

A few examples for you to consider are provided here, each having many possible directions for further exploration. These are presented to help understand the notion of permissions before you do your own exploration with the questions which follow.

Coaches sometimes get criticised by their friends and families for “coaching” them without their permission. In these cases the role is friend or family member, but the coach may be operating from their coach role. Or it could be that others perceive the friend or family member is playing the coach role even when their not, but something about their behaviour and actions has created that perception. Is it the responsibility of the coach to be aware of how others respond to their curiosity?

The parent may get criticised by their family for being too dictatorial in the management of the household, and therefore they rebel. Rather than telling the children to take out the trash or clean their room, what difference would it make if the children were asked what they believe their responsibilities are as a member of the household? Is it the responsibility of the parent to tell the children what to do, or to engage them as members of the household and ask them what they want to do?

For each of your roles, list what permissions you give to yourself and others related to that role, your rights and responsibilities and the other person's role, rights and responsibilities. Please also put next to each permission an (O) for overtly or expressed permission or a (C) for covert permissions (those you never said they couldn't but you also didn't expressly state they could, so the assumption is there that they can). It may also be useful to list what permission has NOT be granted for.

Some examples have been provided below to assist you.

<b>Example: Role Parent</b>	
<b>Permissions for Myself</b>	<b>Permissions for Others</b>
<p><i>I give myself permission to take some time out to just honour my own needs.</i></p> <p><i>I give myself permission to politely tell my children how I'm feeling when I think they are not doing their fair share around the house.</i></p> <p><i>I do not give myself permission to complain about how stressed I am with all of my responsibilities, however I do give myself permission to share what I'm feeling and seek assistance from a solution-focused positive perspective.</i></p>	<p><i>I give my children permission to ask for what they need from me.(O)</i></p> <p><i>I do not give my children permission to take advantage of me. (C)</i></p> <p><i>I give my partner permission to equally share the responsibilities of raising our children and developing our family relationships. (C)</i></p> <p><i>I give my partner permission to tell me how she/he feels at any time without judgement. (O)</i></p>

Role:	
Permissions for Myself	Permissions for Others

Role:	
Permissions for Myself	Permissions for Others

Role:	
Permissions for Myself	Permissions for Others

Role:	
Permissions for Myself	Permissions for Others

Role:	
Permissions for Myself	Permissions for Others

Role:	
Permissions for Myself	Permissions for Others

Role:	
Permissions for Myself	Permissions for Others

Role:	
Permissions for Myself	Permissions for Others

Role:	
Permissions for Myself	Permissions for Others

At this stage, it's time for another analysis series of questions.

- What would be different for you, the other person, or your relationships in general if you were more overt than covert in how you discussed permissions that you or others in your life have?

- If you have been giving yourself permission to do something, but you haven't been honouring that right you've given yourself, what has been the consequence? Furthermore, what would you like to do to turn it around?

- Are there things that you haven't given yourself permission to do, feel or say, that after this analysis you'd like to change and now grant yourself permission? If so, what is the specific change you'd like to make and what do you believe the positive outcomes of that action would be?

- Have you been allowing others to do things without your permission? Is this because you haven't been overt enough? Or are not responding when the boundaries are crossed? What do you want to do about any of this?

- Are you allowing yourself the opportunity to fully express how you're feeling, even if it comes out negative and complaining at first? Are you also solution focused in your comments? This part is important because it may be critical for you to fully express exactly what you're feeling, and potentially even allow yourself a few minutes to "complain" just to get the negativity out of your system, but then change gears and move toward a positive solution. How well do you do this? Is there any change you'd like to make?

- Finally, as a result of this total analysis of your roles, rights, responsibilities and permissions, what commitments are you willing to make right now and follow through with? How will you make these changes? How will you keep yourself on track? And how will you communicate your commitment with others as appropriate?

Please remember that working with a coach may be quite supportive throughout this exploration process. In particular a coach can assist you with evaluating your values, beliefs, attitudes, choices, actions and observations, and specifically assist you in exploring particular habits, communication styles and how you identify and uphold boundaries.

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