



## Stanford eCorner

### Avoiding Excuses and the Mentality of Victimization

Steve Young, *Former NFL Quarterback*

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/1764/Avoiding-Excuses-and-the-Mentality-of-Victimization>

Young talks about how he used negotiation skills to earn his place in the San Francisco 49ers. He describes how he never showed any signs of victimization and played his best on the field. Never give an excuse, he says, and always take the blame where it is appropriate.



#### Transcript

You have to lose yourself a little bit in any kind of negotiation. Let me give an example. When I first started playing for the San Francisco 49ers, of course Joe Montana was the looming figure. Every time I stepped on the field, whether he was there, he was traded, he was hurt or whatever it was, he was obviously a big looming figure. In many ways, the other guys knew that if things didn't go well, they weren't on the hook. "If Steve Young's on the field, we're off the hook." If something goes wrong, what are they going to say? "Joe wasn't on the field. It was Steve's fault." I'm not going to say human nature, but we tend to do the least; we do the most we can with the least amount of effort, especially in football. How can I make myself look good by doing as little as possible? It's especially for football because it's counterintuitive to go ramming into people. It's very intuitive with the crowd yelling and the cheerleaders until the moment when you have to go hit somebody. Then it's like "I don't know about this anymore." That's why you watch football.

Everyone talks about the big game and then all of a sudden someone gets hit, it's like "Ooh." I would run into the huddle there and I've got to negotiate my way across with these guys that aren't necessarily inspired to save my job. I have to look good. All of a sudden, I'm on the field. It's got to happen now. What do I need to do to make sure these guys are inspired to help me? I would wear them out with my self-sacrifice. In other words, I never want to show any sign of victimization. Any time you have a reason for something to go wrong, it's human nature to express it - "That didn't go well because of all these different reasons" - especially in my case, because everyone is being almost unfair because I'm not Joe Montana. If something goes wrong, I want to give the context for it. This happens to most normal quarterbacks, or you want to give excuses. I knew that the second I showed any sign of victimization or I wanted to show a reason why something was going to happen - even if I was right - they would respond negatively.

I won them over, over time, by never cracking to that kind of human nature. I would go home and I would call my dad. "Dad, this sucks. I got screwed again," but in front of them, never. What happened is that I gained some respect because I wouldn't do it when the light was on. That's part of negotiation too, right? I've got to get these guys going. I can't go in there and tell them some rah-rah story - we're all in this together and all that. No. The only way I can do it is just go to work, keep my mouth shut and never give an excuse.