

BEING SIGNIFICANT PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

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Why settle for success when you can grow to significance?

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PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The CEO exclaimed, “*I wish my people would accept responsibility for their behaviors and mistakes rather than finger pointing.*” Unfortunately, finger pointing seems to be the rule rather than the exception in many corporate hallways.

It is important for you to consider one question before reading this article. Do you have the necessary courage to exhibit personal accountability? You may feel tempted to flippantly answer affirmatively, but you may want to examine the consequences associated with being accountable before answering. First, accountability means you are responsible to somebody or for something. Second, being responsible means that you cause something to happen. Third, exhibiting accountability, as seen through the eyes of your co-workers, looks like the following:

1. Accepting complete responsibility for your behavior
2. Meeting/exceeding agreed upon expectations.
3. Admitting mistakes.
4. Admitting limitations of knowledge.

1. Accepting complete responsibility for your behavior.

No more excuses. No more finger pointing. Accepting responsibility is being fully aware of exerting control of your behavior through your choices. Additionally, you accept the consequences of the choices you make while taking the good with the bad.

Integrity, or doing what is right, because that’s the right thing to do, is the epitome of accepting responsibility. As this article is being written, we’re working with a company that has an extensive safety program. In spite of their safety program, we learned about several supervisors who intentionally violate safety procedures in their haste to complete the task as quickly as possible. Clearly, such a breach of integrity constitutes a lack of being accountable. To make matters worse, the message sent to the employees is devastating and dangerous.

2. Meeting/exceeding expectations.

We teach the leadership principle that *we’re here to help people be successful*. Just imagine the synergy if every employee simply lived this principle! You can exhibit personal accountability to create this synergy by modeling the following behaviors.

- A. Know the expected results to be achieved.
- B. Meet/exceed these expectations proactively.
- C. Volunteer to assist whenever possible.
- D. Encourage feedback regarding your performance.
- E. Use the feedback offered to improve performance.

There is no time for laziness when being accountable. The choice is yours. Are you going to be a peak performer or a lazy team member? Remember, the strength of every chain is determined by the strength of its weakest link. Do you want to be the weakest link of your team? In the 20 + years of working with organizations, we've never had anyone respond affirmatively to this question. Sometimes, lazy people think they are high performers! This is an excellent example of the fact that *your perception of me is more important than my perception of me*. The smart thing to do is to ensure your co-workers have the same perception that you do—that you're accountable. Be proactive and quantify your co-workers' perception; compare their perception with yours. Use the draft of a questionnaire included with this article for this assessment.

Hint #1: Be ready to accept the facts. If you should learn that your co-workers do not perceive you as being as accountable as you do, accept their perception and work to change it.

Hint #2: To the degree you believe your co-workers are wrong and deny their data may be the degree they are absolutely right! We often defend our bruised ego by pointing fingers instead of accepting the brutal truth.

Would your co-workers agree that you are accountable?

Before leaving this section, we want to highlight the fact that the more people you help to succeed, the more success you experience. First, the more frequently you accept the responsibility of helping others to be successful, the greater the likelihood others will be willing to assist you. Second, you are always the first recipient when helping others. That is, most people enjoy (feel good) assisting others and helping the team/company achieve success. Are you included in this group?

3. Admitting mistakes.

Your courage will be tested. How willing are you to accept responsibility for your mistakes or do you prefer to blame others? Confident people accept responsibility for their behaviors more easily than those with less confidence. We're also cognizant of the fact that some work styles are more comfortable admitting their mistakes than others. For example, individuals preferring the analytical work style (high compliance with the DISC), struggle with admitting mistakes because they are confident their decisions are based on the correct facts. This example speaks to the importance of knowing yourself and managing the weaker aspects of your interpersonal performance. The bottom line: being aware of the temptation to not admit your mistakes. At that precise time, you must exert the necessary self-control to admit the blatant truth.

Eliminate the fear of admitting mistakes!

Organizational leaders need to be aware of the fact that the Number One reason employees are hesitant to admit mistakes is the fear of reprisal or punishment. That speaks to the very essence of successful organizational leaders using mistakes as learning opportunities rather than a demonstration of punitive power.

Admitting mistakes embraces another one of our leadership principles, *“I’m guilty until proven innocent.”* This principle recognizes that there are two sides to every coin. Effective leaders accept responsibility for every instance when the expected results were not achieved. These leaders demonstrate a passion to learn how they contributed to the breakdown in performance. They’re not interested in pointing fingers. They want to fix whatever they’re doing to contribute to the issue before discussing what another party can also do. Imagine the synergy created whenever adversity strikes, if everyone approached it with the philosophy that *“I’m guilty until I’m proven innocent.”*

There are many psychological payoffs of willingly admitting mistakes beginning with telling people you are honest and can be trusted. Remember, trust has been labeled as the lubricant for working relationships. You want the reputation of applying a lot of grease to improve the efficiency of the working parts. People will likewise respect your professionalism and courage. You become the individual people enjoy working with and the leader people like to follow. Now that’s a good thing.

4. Admitting limitations of knowledge.

One has to be competent in order to recognize their incompetence. Or, worded differently, the more you know the more you realize what you don’t know.

Accepting responsibility for your lack of knowledge takes courage. Many individuals attempt to “fake it” when it would be in their best interest to admit, “I don’t know the answer, but I will find out.” Unless you are a very good actor, people recognize when you’re faking it and that spells “t-r-o-u-b-l-e” for you.

Consequences

Every action has a consequence. As you read the following lists of advantages and disadvantages, decide which reputation you want in the workplace. We start with the list of disadvantages:

1. You’re not trusted.
2. You’re not respected.
3. You send the message that you don’t care about your co-workers or your company.
4. You may be considered lazy.
5. Your actions may derail your career.

Advantages of Being Accountable Exceed the Disadvantages

You have much to gain by exhibiting personal accountability. Some of these are listed below:

1. You are trusted.
2. You are respected.
3. You send the message that you are willing to do whatever is necessary for the success of the team.
4. You are a “high performing” professional.
5. Your job security is likely increased.
6. You improve the likelihood of being promoted.
7. You can be trusted to complete challenging and meaningful job assignments.

Who do you want to be?

Change

We detail the personal change process in our book, *Smart People Work People Smart*. If you're looking to gain a deeper understanding of personal accountability, we encourage you to read that book. For the purpose of this article, you must be acutely aware when you're tempted to not demonstrate personal accountability. At that point, you exert self-control. You tell yourself to “Stop & Think.” Ask, “Do I want to make a good choice or a bad one?” Of course, you want to make a good one - exhibiting accountability. As the Nike commercial so clearly communicates, “Just do it.”

In Closing

We end this article as we began it by asking you to answer the question, “Do you have the necessary courage to exhibit personal accountability?”

Quantify Perceptions

Instructions: Complete the **self assessment** using the following Likert scale.

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------|
| 1 = Never | 4 = Frequently |
| 2 = Almost Never | 5 = Almost Always |
| 3 = Sometimes | 6 = Always |

1. I accept responsibility for my behavior.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Colleagues describe me as exhibiting integrity, or doing what is right because it's the right thing to do.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. I know the expected results to be achieved.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. I proactively meet/exceed what is expected of me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. I volunteer to assist others whenever possible.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. I encourage others to provide constructive feedback as to how I can improve my performance.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. I use the constructive feedback offered by others to improve my performance.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. I willingly admit my mistakes.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. I willingly admit limitations to my knowledge.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Overall, I exhibit personal accountability.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Listed below is an example of re-wording the statements so colleagues can rate you.

1. Larry accepts responsibility for his behavior.
2. Team members describe Larry as exhibiting integrity, or doing what is right because it's the right thing to do.
3. Larry knows the expected results to be achieved.
4. Larry proactively meets/exceeds what is expected of him.
5. Larry volunteers to assist others whenever possible.
6. Larry encourages team members to provide constructive feedback as to how he can improve his performance.
7. Larry uses the constructive feedback offered by others to improve his performance.
8. Larry willingly admits his mistakes.
9. Larry willingly admits limitations to his knowledge.
10. Overall, Larry exhibits personal accountability.

"Some favorite expressions of small children: "It's not my fault. . . They made me do it. . . I forgot." Some favorite expressions of adults: "It's not my job. . . No one told me. . . It couldn't be helped." True freedom begins and ends with personal accountability."

- Dan Zadra

Contact Information

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Since 1989, he has consulted to a variety of organizations, written articles and books, and has spoken to audiences about maximizing interpersonal performance.

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Suggested Reading

Bethel, Sheila. *A New Breed of Leader: 8 Leadership Qualities that Matter Most in the Real World*. (2009).

Cole, Larry & Cole, Michael. *People-Smart Leaders: Maximize People, Performance & Profits*. (2005).

Cook, David. *Golf's Sacred Journey: Seven Days At The Links of Utopia*. (2008).

George Bill. *True North*. (2007).

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The authors have a series of eBooks detailing how to improve your interpersonal performance, coaching with the 7-Step Personal Change Process©, twelve leadership principles leading to peak performance, and using the 7-Step Change Process© to institutionalize leadership/teamwork values within your organization.

We encourage you to log onto www.truegrowthassociates.com to learn about these eBooks and other articles available for your use.