

The Accountability Leader: Inspiring Your Team to Exceed its Goals

BY LEE FROSCHHEISER



Passion within the workplace—does this topic get your attention? It should. But we’re not talking about romantic relationships at the office; we’re talking about company leaders creating “passion”—as in a boundless, extremely fervent fondness and commitment—for the job and company. In fact, in every organization, one of the major roles of the leader is to be a “passion maker,” or someone who is responsible for developing and inspiring enthusiasm within the entire chain of command.

One of the most powerful ways successful leaders create passion is by setting up an effective system of “accountability,” which is measuring performance and taking appropriate action. Understanding the crucial role of accountability in the workplace, and using it to drive a business’ success and inspire its workers, is more than possible—and

that’s the best-kept secret when it comes to top-of-the-line leadership.

A lack of accountability in the workplace is one of the biggest reasons why companies struggle and sometimes fail. Often, accountability is not managed consistently and fairly because leaders tend to focus on

the negative—people mistakenly associate accountability with only discipline and punishment. In today’s business environment, many CEOs and managers are facing the consequences related to a lack of proper accountability. These business leaders need to take immediate corrective action to create strategic alignment to their vital goals and drive performance through a strong accountability system.

A Closer Look at the Accountable Workplace

One way to understand accountability is to examine a workplace that doesn’t have any. When there’s a lack of accountability, a company tends to resemble what’s called a “country club,” as opposed to a “jail-like” culture. The “A players” often end up leaving because they crave and deserve accountability; they get frustrated when good performance isn’t recognized and poor performers aren’t held accountable. Conversely, in such an environment, businesses struggle to attract top talent because those types of workers want to be in an environment that values accountability.

In addition, the company without accountability doesn’t perform to its potential, and standards are allowed to slip. Things just don’t get done, and because the organization isn’t performing as expected, morale suffers too. People who shouldn’t be there drag the company culture down, and complacency and mediocrity are accepted. As a result, more and more of the responsibilities weigh on the shoulders of the company leader, who carries the full burden of the organization and is often overwhelmed because he or she hasn’t pushed accountability down into the lower tiers of responsibility.

On the other hand, a company with thriving accountability looks quite different.

Accountability enables a leader to create ownership for the company on behalf of its workers. That means developing ownership for problems, successes, goals, initiatives, people, and results—a.k.a., getting things done. Accountability sets the controls in place, drives the business, and indicates what is and what isn't on track. Through accountability, leaders always make three important discoveries:

- Whether they're on the right course;
- Whether they've got the right people (and in the right places); and
- Whether they're achieving goals.

With these findings, leaders gain insight on instituting change and setting new objectives.

How Passion Plays Into the Accountability Picture

Accountability holds leaders to the task of clearly defining goals for the company and

its people, as well as establishing measurements to assess those goals and define success. And it's this accountability that provides an opportunity to assign ownership to company and personal performance objectives, measure results, and follow through with objective evaluations.

When people own a piece in the goal-setting puzzle and achieve what they set out to do, it can be highly rewarding for each individual involved; even more so when the leader follows through with positive recognition, acknowledging the team players for their achievements. The result of this is that people become impassioned about their role in the company's welfare and their own professional development—something that is actually quite personal and close to the heart. This newfound passion is the driver for productivity. It incites people to work harder, dream bigger, and excel.

In addition, accountability can be a highly positive experience for a leader, its team players, and the company at large, which is

contrary to the notion that accountability connotes something "negative." Often associated with the term "feedback," and viewed as derogatory if results have not been accomplished, accountability can provide opportunities to coach someone, counsel that person, and enable growth. It also provides leaders with the chance to develop their own skills, such as learning how to have difficult conversations about poor performance. Accountability provides the chance for all to improve upon their weaknesses and position and propel a business toward a place of prosperity. It's this uplifting, highly positive, and evolutionary experience that creates passion in the workplace. It's simply an invigorating place to be.

Roadblocks to Accountability

Effective accountability can be achieved in your company only if several common roadblocks are avoided. First, whether you're a company owner, manager, or team leader, set aside the natural tendency to confuse

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accountability with not being liked. In your position, avoid crossing the line of getting too close to people. Instead, focus on earning the respect, not the friendship, of professional peers. Remember, when it comes to infusing passion into the workplace, your job is to create loyalty to the company, not loyalty to you.

Second, you will be seriously challenged if you fail to set goals and expectations on a continual basis. Equally important is making sure people understand the goals and expectations, and what's required of them. For example, everyone involved needs good goal criteria—not just measuring the number of activities, but the results.

Lastly, you can't get complacent. Clients aren't complacent, the market isn't complacent, and investors aren't complacent, so neither should you. Strong leaders recognize that when success is achieved, the bar must be raised. When it's not, passion will wane, and productivity will be at risk. Sure, this will be a challenge in and of itself, but if a company doesn't grow, it dies. Your ultimate job is to build and sustain a thriving organization. And one thing is for sure: creating passion through accountability is arguably one of the most important, best-kept secrets you must know to achieve a continuous track record of success. **CM**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

LEE FROSCHHEISER, president and CEO of Management Actions Programs, works with many premiere business leaders and companies nationwide. He specializes in creating goal alignment and using effective accountability to drive company results. He is also coauthor of the best-selling book, *Vital Factors, The Secret to Transforming Your Business—And Your Life*.

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A Checklist for Creating Accountability



Establish clear goals and expectations—Always set standards for performance, and put policies and procedures in place.



Make sure you've got "accountability leaders" within the organization—These will be those managers who challenge the drive and performance of other employees and measure the results.



Foster an organization of candor—Transparent, honest communications enable people to provide feedback about their performance and limit opportunities to hedge around an issue.



Develop and implement a follow-up system of accountability—This should allow for regular meetings that measure and track performance, productivity, and results.



Focus on the vital few instead of the trivial many when setting company goals—Do the same for individual goals set by each employee.



Put the proper rewards and recognition in place—Remember, these don't always have to be monetary in nature; verbal praise, both in the private and public setting, is highly appreciated and motivating.



Define ownership of each new process and procedure you establish.



Develop a "leadership pipeline"—Accountability starts at the top of the organization and works itself down; therefore, CEOs and managers must strive to perfect their own leadership skills and accountability before expecting others within the organization to do the same.