



## **Creating a Culture of Accountability**

In the work environment, there is a nebulous feeling in the air that drives what gets done and how. It's called "culture". It's intangible, yet palpable. And in organizations, it either sustains and boosts performance, or it impedes and even sabotages the greatest of plans.

### ***Defining Culture***

So what is this compelling force? It's the norms, expectations, tolerances, values, habits, standards, approaches, attitudes, relationships and general morale of a company. Culture is not just about some core values posted in the company break room or on the intranet site. Culture is defined in how we show up in dialogue with each other – our disagreements, collaborations, providing feedback, sharing new ideas and even how we run our meetings. It's how we listen, respect, respond; it's characterized by who makes decisions and how. It's also how much, or how little, we trust and empower each other to do our jobs.

Culture is essentially about the spirit of the organization. As Santa Clara University Management Professor David Caldwell puts it, culture is, "*the invisible stuff that glues organizations together.*"

### ***Don't focus on changing it***

While change is a constant, and generally a sign of a healthy, growing organization, attempting to change a culture is a daunting task. Culture is difficult to measure; therefore it is difficult to manage. You can't simply declare it, demand it or dictate it. There's nothing worse than management trying to dictate a certain kind of culture! If you are trying to implement change in your organization, examine the role of your existing culture. Is it serving as a roadblock or a conduit for change?

### ***Focus on cultivating accountability***

Accountability is about personal ownership for the results in one's world – on an individual and organizational level. When you step into accountability, you bring empowerment, commitment, problem solving and a sense of urgency to get things done. You know the end game and see things through to completion. Conversely, when we slip into being a victim; we feel powerless, confused, tired, helpless, frustrated, angry and stuck. We make excuses and blame others or the situation. The victim mode is wrought with finger pointing, inefficiencies and ineffectiveness.



Research from the California-based Partners in Leadership firm shows that a lack of personal accountability for achieving organizational results is a common organizational challenge:

- 83% feel they would do things differently if it were their own company
- 63% found themselves waiting to see if a situation would resolve itself
- 85% have felt powerless, that they had no control over their situation
- Almost 60% admitted that they saw a problem developing, but did nothing about it
- 76% have fallen into the "just tell me what to do" trap

You can focus on cultivating the kind of culture you want by modeling standards and values. If you want initiative, accountability, responsibility—take initiative, be accountable and be responsible. As you practice it, and reward others who also demonstrate the attitudes, behaviors and values you say you want, you'll find the tides of culture shifting to a more robust, performance based organization. Additionally, open up your organization for real transparency. A more transparent organization lends itself to a healthier culture as it breeds trust, accountability and improved communications.

### ***Take the K Communications Challenge:***

Build on your culture's strengths. You'll find this approach much easier and more rewarding than trying to overcome your culture's current limitations. And, practice the following attitudes and actions:

1. **Choose it. Own it. Drive it.** Make being accountable an active, every day, every moment choice. Step up your personal accountability game! Make things happen, see things through to completion. Be a part of the solution.
2. **Catch yourself playing the victim.** Notice when you are making excuses (*I don't have enough time, my boss won't let me, don't have the budget*) or blaming (*he didn't get me the numbers in time, she made me late, he doesn't have the necessary skills*), or are just plain frustrated. These areas are often a place where we have slipped into being a victim. Once we see the subtleties of how we look at things, we can start choosing to be fully accountable for our thoughts, words and our actions.
3. **Set clear and high expectations.** Clarify direction, goals, and authority. Have high expectations for yourself and others; encourage risk taking; treat mistakes as learning experiences; and provide clear, honest and regular feedback.
4. **Share the decision-making.** Making decisions together fosters accountability. The opportunity to shirk accountability is increased when someone just wait to be told what to do.



5. **Hold each other accountable.** High performing teams know their goals and expect each other to contribute fully. Remember, you get what you tolerate!

Start where you are and with what you have. Cultivating a culture of accountability takes time and intentionality, but even small shifts can start improving your company's culture.

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