

How to Build a Culture of Accountability

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A culture of accountability is an organization of accountable employees. Results are communicated and understood by everybody. Accountability is determined proactively, *before* the fact, not reactively, *after* the fact. When a mistake is made, the response is not finger pointing and excuses – it is about solving the problem and learning from mistakes. Every employee feels a sense of ownership for organizational results and will do what it takes to achieve those results.

Now, who wouldn't want to work in that kind of culture? Even more importantly, how do you create a culture of accountability? It starts and ends with leadership! Leaders - starting at the top, and at all levels – will send a clear and consistent message (good or bad) about “how we do things around here”. So, what can leaders do to encourage a culture of accountability?

Walk the Talk

Nowadays, organizations are so afraid of lawsuits that they won't admit mistakes. That kind of excuse making and blaming others will cascade down and permeate throughout the organizations. When a leader can stand before their **employees** and say “*I made a mistake – and this is what we're going to do to fix it*” it sets a positive example of accountable behaviour that employees won't be afraid to emulate.

Define Results and Expectations

Don't wait for a mistake to happen and then waste energy finding who is to blame. Instead, set **clear standards and expectations** before the work even starts. Then, make sure all employees are aware of and understand what results the organization is trying to achieve and what the expectations are for all employees. Every employee should have a “line of sight” to the organization's desired results.

Gain Commitment

Without commitment, we get compliance or even resistance. “I’ll try” is not commitment. Ask: “Do I have your commitment?” and listen to any concerns. Work with the employee to overcome barriers and figure out what needs to do to obtain their commitment.

Be Open to Feedback and Problem Solving

In other words, never “shoot the messenger”. Have an open-door environment where any employee is empowered to bring any problem to anyone in the organization without fear of repercussion.

Hire Accountable Employees

Don’t just hire for technical skills and experience, [hire for cultural fit](#). Look for a track record of admitting mistakes and overcoming obstacles.

Coach Employees on How to Be Accountable

Many individuals come from backgrounds where they never had to be accountable. They are used to awards for 5th place. They may have to learn new skills and behaviours, like critical thinking and problem before they can begin to thrive in a culture of accountability.

Consequences and Reinforcement

Ultimately, there has to be consequences for consistently poor performance and reinforcing for positive results and behaviours. Without this, employees will soon catch on that accountability is all talk and no action.

Hold Each Other Accountable

In a culture of accountability, leaders don’t just hold employees accountable for results. Everyone holds everyone accountable! Every employee takes ownership of organizational results, not just their own little part of the world. Again, leaders can role model, teach, and reinforce this kind of ownership mentality.

Culture will change in a positive way when leaders consistently practice these 8 principles. If they won’t or can’t, then perhaps it’s time to find new leaders.