

Being accountable demonstrates true leadership

By BILL HOWATT

LEADERS ARE responsible for creating plans, measures and strategies that collectively define the direction and outcomes of a business. But plans and strategies are of little value if employees are neither motivated to perform nor want to be accountable for their actions.

Accountability leadership is a mindset that promotes the notion that each person in a workplace has a set of tasks and functions that define the expectations of their role. Within these expectations, workers are the owner of their own behaviour.

Another principle of accountability leadership is to support the workforce to be successful. This includes the expectation that leaders will hold their workforce accountable in a firm, fair and consistent manner.

Leaders must manage accountability in order to align business and people. Accountability leadership is a major milestone in predicting a leader's ultimate success.

To increase accountability in the workplace, leaders first need to define a set of best practices that frame how to implement accountability. Then they must start to implement them. Over time, employees will become more accountable for their behaviour as they learn that ultimately it will be the milestone that defines their success.

Examples of some best practices for promoting accountability:

- Talk openly and regularly about performance expectations and accountabilities; do not assume people know.
- Promote the principle that employees are responsible for their behaviour and performance.
- Accept that fear creates only compliance, not learning. Employees need to learn to be accountable for their production.
- Encourage people to evaluate their performance on a regular basis.
- Accept that when employees choose not to do their jobs it is their responsibility, not yours; it is only your job to hold them accountable.
- Use the EAC model. For all positions ensure employees are clear about their expectations, accountabilities and consequences, both positive and negative.

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- Confronting and holding people accountable for their behaviour is being a positive role model because you are accountable for your team's performance.
- Do not make excuses for people; it will become a habit. Give employees the support to fix their mistakes.
- Do not rescue employees by anticipating failure; it prevents them from learning accountability.
- Encourage people to talk openly about the positive and negative consequences of their actions.
- Reward and acknowledge good work.
- Monitor the workforce to ensure all of the positive and negative consequences around accountability are perceived as real.
- Hold all employees and yourself to one standard of accountability.
- Include teams in planning and develop an effective communications strategy to distribute accurate, relevant and current information.
- Use a standard project management strategy to monitor progress and report progress regularly.
- Develop a balance scorecard on performance and provide feedback on a regular basis so employees always know where they stand.
- Be approachable and open to discuss issues and employees' concerns.

Accept that people make choices and it is no reflection on your leadership if a person chooses to fail. If employees choose to fail (for example, continues to be late on projects for no good reason), give them the right to fail with dignity without being judged.

Do not personalize employees' frustration and anger when enforcing accountability. If they choose not to do their job and want to blame others, they have not yet learned they have made a choice and you have made yours.

