

Assignment #3 Final Summary

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Introduction

For many people the word accountability elicits fear and worry. It draws to mind politicians, CEOs, company presidents and comptrollers who make public apologies for something that should not have happened. They offer a press conference to take accountability for some wrongdoing, accident, ethical misconduct or critical mistake that must be corrected. If they do not come forward with an apology, news anchors and social media influencers will often demand one question “who is going to be held accountable?”

For many, this is how accountability is understood. It is synonymous with shame and blame. At times, even managers, supervisors and company leaders will avoid thinking about accountability until they receive an email indicating that the report will be late, the budget is blown and the deliverables did not get delivered. It is often in the face of mishap that accountability comes to the forefront of everyone’s mind. Greg Bustin (2014) in *Accountability* points out that accountability is not a tool for punishment but rather a tool to enhance performance. Further, accountability should not be an afterthought, it should be the first thought because it not only impacts organizations, it also impacts staff as a group of employees and bears a weight upon each individual.

Accountability in many organizations takes the form of performance measures, inventories or surveys. In schools, for example, teaching staff are often evaluated using strict criteria that they do not inform. Instead there is a framework used that staff might or might not buy into. However if the approach to staff evaluation is one of support, growth and development, the process can become more meaningful and worthwhile to the employee being evaluated. In this way accountability becomes something the best employees want.

When managing staff, accountability should always be about starting off on the right foot with clear directions, expectations that are understood and reasonable goals outlined. It is not a tool that comes out when things go wrong. It is out all the time supporting staff to become the best they can and do the

most they can in an effort to achieve whatever has been identified as the goal. This course demonstrated that accountability can be an effective way of measuring success and ensuring a positive climate and culture in an organization. However, a positive and productive organization must also invest in employees and this can begin with having good relationships. Individuals must have opportunities to engage in purposeful work and feel valued by the organization. Employees have an important role to play in the organization's success and on their own.

Individual accountability was the final concept presented in the course. The focus in the final module was how accountability can be an important driver for self-actualization and success. If we rethink accountability and approach it as a tool for higher performance it will work to ensure that goals are set and achievement occurs consistently over time. The four additional books in the course, *Drive*, *Mindset*, *Daring to Lead* and *Think Again* all point the way to self-mastery and clearly demonstrate the importance of holding ourselves accountable.

In our personal lives, accountability can work as a tool to support and enhance our performance ensuring we become the very best we can be.

Accountability by Greg Bustin

Summary

There is a systematic way to approach accountability and produce better performance in employees and leaders. Bustin's method is built upon 7 pillars: character, unity, learning, tracking, urgency, reputation and evolving. These pillars create the acronym CULTURE a key driver of workplace performance, productivity and success. Bustin's book suggests that if organizations can engage with the seven pillars of accountability they will create positive, productive work environments where people thrive. Accountability will be seen as an act of love in service to the employee and not as a tool for punishment.

According to Bustin, accountability begins with having a sense of purpose. Like leadership, accountability requires that you start with yourself. "Before you can expect others to be accountable, you first must be accountable to yourself." (p. 2) This is accomplished by getting clear about your goals, values and beliefs. Who do you want to be? What drives you? Are two questions leaders must be able to answer before they can be successful leading others. Two other significant questions for everyone are: "What do I want out of life?" and "Is my business helping me get to it or keeping me from it?" Bustin suggests that we have to take hold of our lives and ensure that we know what we are after and then have the courage to go after it. In order to obtain a clear picture of what you want in all aspects of your life, Bustin suggests using the 7 Fs, Family, Friends, Faith, Fitness, Financial, Function and Fun. Goals should be outlined for each of the seven categories to obtain a clear picture of what it is you want out of life. By understanding what you are after you can hold yourself accountable. Once you understand how to hold yourself accountable, you can hold others accountable too.

One of the most important components of accountability is having a plan for how you will achieve your goals. "Without a plan expectations are not clear. And without clear expectations accountability is not possible." (Bustin, 2021, p.21)

High performance organizations with high levels of accountability stand out in three important ways: They have high levels of trust, a focus on excellence and the belief that they can achieve it, and a common sense approach to goal attainment. These organizations have positive cultures that do not eat strategy for breakfast. The culture of an organization can be used as a predictor of success. Culture is therefore critical to organizational success. An organization with strong accountability is likely to have a positive culture.

Because culture is critical to the success of an organization Bustin uses an acronym that spells CULTURE to unpack the key elements of accountability. The C stands for character. At the heart of character are three critical traits: integrity, honesty and respect. A common saying that often appears in search engines when looking for leadership quotes is, “Character shows up when no one is watching.” This speaks to integrity, which is all about doing what you said you would do when you said you would do it. When we think of honesty we think of those individuals who tell it like it is, and communicate in a transparent manner. Respect can show up in many ways however, when it is a character trait, respect is all about how the individual treats others and the self-discipline that holds them to high standards of behavior and decorum

Unity is the second key component in accountability and it hinges upon the leaders ability to ensure that there is both buy-in and ownership in the organization. A transparent leader is also more likely to create a unified environment. Everyone in the organization needs to have a clear understanding of the vision, mission and values which underpin the aims of the organization. Having clear expectations for employees makes it much easier for the team to stay headed toward the same goal. Without clarity on the mission, vision, values and goals there can be significant misunderstandings which can lead to problems within the organization and issues with accountability. A shortcut to a unified environment is to begin with hiring great people. Bustin suggests that you hire for values. Your character is built upon your values and in times of adversity your values become crystal clear. It is therefore important to ensure that the people who are hired have the right set of values. Everything else can be trained. Furthermore, Bustin

notes that great people attract great people. However when conflicts arise, and they will, it is important for the team to work through the problems in honest and open ways while remaining committed to achieving the goals of the organization.

The L in CULTURE stands for learning a key component in continuous improvement. Learning in an organization should not be top down but rather it should include opportunities for everyone in the organization to learn from each other. Learning should be side-to-side and bottom to top as well as being driven from the top. Organizations must also recognize that learning will require them to confront the reality that there may be better ways to do things. Bustin cautions, “If you don’t want to improve, don’t ask people for their feedback.” (Bustin, 2014, p.114).

Chapter 7 of *Accountability*, is dedicated to Tracking which provides the T in the CULTURE acronym. The main idea of Tracking is that performance will be measured. Many companies use key performance indicators (KPIs) for workers and products to help measure performance. Well run profitable companies want to know: How are we doing and how can we improve? The best thing a leader can do with the data that is tracked is to determine how to use it to make better decisions for the organization. Ultimately those decisions will result in either poor performance or powerful performance. Bustin draws a similarity between the Unity pillar and the Tracking pillar. He notes that the Unity Pillar is concerned with: Deciding how much information to share; Ensuring that everyone knows what is expected of them; and Aligning rewards and penalties with performance. This echoes in the Tracking Pillar as well. The Tracking Pillar involves: Deciding what performance indicators to track and what increments to use; Ensuring that what’s being tracked is shared widely and connects with your employees intellectually, operationally, emotionally and financially; Making the tracking timely, accurate, consistent and visible. Both pillars are concerned with communication. Transparency in tracking is critical. Employees need to know what is expected of them, what is being tracked and how this information will be used.

Chapter 8 unpacks Urgency as the second U in CULTURE. In education today there is a strong emphasis on urgency which is reflected in most high performing organizations. This is not about hasty

and quick decisions. Rather urgency comes from a focus on a few priorities with unwavering commitment and purpose. Urgency, according to Bustin, involves three critical actions: 1. Maintaining a laser-like focus on the goal and the work; 2. Reducing red tape and bureaucracy in favor of action; 3. Recognizing mistakes and addressing them without delays. Again the concept of a common-sense approach is emphasized as a key driver of success. This common sense approach is embodied in over communication and recognizing that people want to do well. In good times, according to Bustin high performing companies build trust. In the bad times, when profits are low and so is morale, trust is tested. Bustin quotes Brian Lacey on page 181, “ When you provide good people with enough information to operate well, they are going to strive to meet or exceed your requirements.”

Reputation is the R pillar in CULTURE and it needs very little explanation. Reputation is closely linked to character. If character is what you think you are doing, then reputation is what others say you are doing. Reputation is also linked to integrity since it is a measure of how closely you or your organization embodies stated values and goals. Often when we think of reputation we are outward facing, however Bustin notes that leaders must be conscious of how they appear to the people within the organization. How is conflict and adversity handled? Some of the conflict faced by organizations does not come from competitors but rather from co-workers. Bustin describes several types of employees who can have a negative impact on culture: the Sugar-Coater, the Control-Freak, the Monday Morning Quarterback, the Gossip, the Dictator, the Know-It-All, the Fire-Fighter, the Cover-Up Artist, the Joker, the Quitter, the Sandbagger, the Empire-Builder. The types of behavioral styles are culture crashers in an organization. It is up to the leader to address unwanted behaviors. “As a leader, you get the behavior you tolerate” (p.205). When faced with problem behaviors, the leader must take action immediately because left unaddressed things will not improve. On page 220 Bustin outlines nine questions that can support an employee in getting back on track. The list of questions begins with: “How would you describe the situation?” and ends with “What can I do to help you achieve the expected result?” The undertone in all nine questions is support and care. The questions are designed to identify what the expectations are, what

successfully achieving the expectations would look like and how to move the employee along to successful achievement of the expectations. However in the end if people can't change, you have to change the people.

The last pillar in CULTURE is Evolving. Companies must always be evolving, learning and growing. As customer needs change, organizations who want their business must evolve too. This can be a challenge for people within the organization who have to change and adapt to the new processes. People hang on to: "But this is the way we have always done it" or "We have never done it that way." In order to create change, the leader must lessen the employee's stance and create conditions where people actually want to embrace change. This can be a challenge because the change cycle is hard for most people according to Bustin because it involves giving up one thing for another, change usually occurs after something bad has happened, and things do not always improve with the change. Things often become worse before they become better. High performance companies can weather these storms if they commit to their values and principles. When evolving, companies need to change their practices while hanging on to their principles.

Bustin ends Accountability, with a reminder that all companies are moving from point A to point B and so they all face similar challenges of accountability. Context and complexity might differ however Bustin's seven pillars provide a bridge to successfully make the journey.

Reflection

Perhaps the most important take away from *Accountability* is found in Chapter 8. Accountability is affection not punishment. All too often accountability has been the tool used after staff fail to achieve KPI. Bustin flips this and makes a very compelling case for how to use accountability as a tool to achieve the KPIs. By starting tasks with a strong sense of purpose, a defined goal, clear expectations and support for achievement, accountability becomes the driver of achievement not a tool to be utilized in the case of failure.

A second point of reflection comes from Chapter 9 and the discussion on the Culture Crashers. The list that Bustin provides reflects all of the challenging individuals I have encountered and a few that I have not met. One missing character is the Naysayer. That is the individual who doubts that something can be done to improve things. They doubt new policies, procedures, the new leader and even a new book. The Naysayer can be toxic in a work environment and the doubt displayed only yields to the equally damaging, “that can’t work here”. The behaviors exhibited by employees whether they show up as the Control Freak or the Joker, must be managed. As a leader you cannot ignore destructive behavior otherwise it undermines your credibility. Bustin makes it clear that as a leader “you get the behavior you tolerate.”

A third reflection comes from the Tracking pillar. The Chapter 7 subtitle, *What Your Best Employees Want*, suggests that employees want to know what they need to accomplish and how they will be assessed. Leaders often waste significant amounts of time on the “culture crashers” in whatever ways they may show up. Time is spent trying to get them to buy into the changes occurring and stay on track when the goal is in jeopardy. Tracking the right actions and using appropriate data, can help all employees see the impact of their actions. By consistently tracking the right indicators, data can be used to change practices. This is an effective way to mitigate the impact of culture crashers. A good example of this comes from Dennis Jameson in his work with Trinity Valley foods. Jameson changed the culture of the organization by using data to change behavior. Trinity Valley engaged in four key actions:

1. Upgrading staffing, 2. Initiating Training, 3. Upgrading Tools and 4. Creating a Sense of Urgency.

Without reliable data you cannot make informed decisions. This is perhaps why the best employees want to engage in tracking. It helps them evaluate how they are doing and make appropriate changes to move from good to great.

A fourth point of reflection comes from the Kip Tinedell quote on page 125, “...we invest in training and training and more training.” You cannot educate your employees enough. Employees appreciate having on the job training in matters that help them perform better in their roles. However

DEIB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging) training is also well received as it helps staff work more effectively together and enjoy greater success in the world. Investment in training pays huge dividends not only in loyalty, morale and productivity but also in retention. When you invest in training people they become the strength of the organization and that training is the key to changing culture. When we educate our staff and sit side-by-side with them in the training, we grow together as an organization. Effective training allows us to learn how to be better at our jobs, achieve more with the time we invest and ultimately, produce higher outcomes.

A fifth point of reflection is the importance of creating a sense of urgency. Urgency as defined as placing a laser-like focus on a few priorities, with reduced red tape and a willingness to correct mistakes quickly is a compelling process for creating action plans that actually get launched. Many organizations often get lost in the weeds of planning and execution remains far out of reach. Steven Katz, author of Quality Implementation, notes the challenges schools and systems have in launching initiatives. There are a number of factors that interfere with quality implementation and certainly red tape is one. I witnessed first hand the number of barriers intended and unintended that interfere with how initiatives are implemented as well as what gets implemented. We need to have a bias for action much more could be accomplished in less time.

Application

I think this is a brilliant book for leaders and there is much that I will and have already migrated into my leadership practice.

1. Goal Setting

Following through with the premise that you have to know yourself and be able to lead yourself before you can lead others, I have incorporated the 7 Fs into my life. As Bustin notes on page 2, before you can expect others to be accountable you have to be accountable to yourself. For years now, I have been holding myself accountable in several areas: Life, Learning, Friends, Fitness and Finances. Now I have changed that to: Family, Friends, Faith, Fitness, Finances, Function and Fun. I think Learning still needs a category on its own. For me Learning is fun but it also serves a function when I am updating my skills and knowledge to have a direct through line to my job performance or opportunities. I constantly assess how I am doing in these areas and I follow the advice of James Clear to do a Life Audit at the end of each calendar year.

Recently, I was asked to do an opening address for a small group of Principals and Vice-Principals who come together in an Affinity Group. Although this group is composed of successful individuals, the reality is that we are always striving to achieve more and gain greater fulfillment from life. With this in mind, I created a slide on the 7 Fs and suggested to the group that they set goals in these areas and track how well they are doing. Data is a key driver of improvement. What we measure we can master.

2. Watch Listen and Learn

As a new Superintendent I know a key responsibility is to learn as much about the organization as quickly as I can. I also know that I need to understand the culture and the people. If we want to grow the organization we have to grow the people. I make an effort to get out to on average 1 two schools daily and I watch how principals interact with their staff, the students and on occasion their wider school community. This is important street data that helps me identify areas for coaching or mentorship. The practical skills of any job are as important as the soft skills. I spend time working on listening to really hear what is being said and watching to see what leadership moves are helping the school and which are hindering progress.

I have been focusing on how to engage in learning conversations and how to improve principal accountability for school improvement. I have recently started using David Alexander's Five Life Lessons found on page 135 in my direct messaging to principals and in how I interact in meetings and throughout the organization. The principle of influence is one I share now in my presentations to affinity groups and aspiring leaders. I want them to know that where you are right now can be a place of influence. I learned this principle in 2019 when I read Clay Scroggins book *How to Lead When You're Not in Charge*. The principle of others I take with me on every school visit as I try to learn the names of office staff, students and teachers. Not an easy task when you have 24 schools but what a game changer when people realize you know their name or remember that they were taking their dog to the vet.

In our district we have a North Star that guides our work. It is highly aspirational but critical if we want to make a difference for students. I am now intentionally including a slide in my presentations with the North Star statement. I am also referencing the North Star in conversations about student learning and well-being. The vision has to be active and front of mind otherwise it becomes a slogan without real meaning. I see the principle of positivity as a

main part of my job. I want to build my reputation on a “yes we can” attitude. I want the staff in schools to look forward to my visits and see them as an opportunity to celebrate what’s good. The final principle is the mission. I am glad John Maxwell is quoted because it is a mantra I have adopted for my leadership practice. I lead with kindness and compassion because no one will care how much I know, until they know how much I care.

3. The Iceberg Conversation

As we are moving toward the winter break there is still a great deal of hope and optimism in the air. I know teachers are excited about the progress made so far and principals are hopeful that the scores will go up. However the harsh reality is that winter is long and cold. As soon as our students stop progressing in the ways we anticipated people begin to lose faith in the operating strategy. My plan is to use many of the questions found on page 220 in my coaching conversations. I like the first question: How would you describe the situation? This requires reflection, description and analysis. I also like the last question: What can I do to help you achieve the expected results? This is an important question because it speaks to the fact that accountability is not about blame and shame, it is about clear expectations, defined goals and a supportive plan to ensure we move from Point A to Point B.

Organizational Accountability

Summary

All organizations have a core desire to be successful whether they are non-profit or for profit. Success cannot be achieved without a clear vision, a strong understanding of the mission and a sincere commitment to the values of the organization. Successful companies are able to foster purpose, accountability, and fulfillment (Bustin, 2014). Accountability is really the map that is developed from purpose to achieve the results that create fulfillment.

A good plan, or accountability system, consists of clearly defined expectations that are set out to achieve the goals of the organization. Accountability might entail formal reporting relationships, performance evaluations, employment contracts, reward systems (including compensation), disciplinary procedures, supervisory leadership training, and personnel manuals (Frink & Klimoski, 2004).

According to the Power DMS, a website designed to support workers, organizational accountability is about defining the company's mission, values, and goals, as well as everyone's role in working toward them. It's also about holding employees and executives responsible for accomplishing stated goals and making decisions that achieve the stated goals. Ironically, when accountability comes to mind people envision a system of rewards and punishments. However, carrots and sticks are only a small part of the story. Accountability is really about relationships built on purpose and trust (Bustin, 2014). The culture of an organization will dictate what accountability looks like in the organization. To build a culture of accountability Bustin argues that the organizations need a foundation of interdependence, endurance, adaptation and responsibility. In addition to this, accountability will depend on the cultural norms, loyalty to an

individual's superior and colleagues, and respect for the clients or customers of the organization. (Frink & Klimoski, 2004).

The culture of an organization is a huge driver of accountability. In fact Bustin conceptualizes accountability as a bridge that takes you from Point A to Point B. There are seven pillars in that bridge and those seven pillars are concepts that form the acronym CULTURE. The acronym stands for: Character, Unity, Learning, Tracking, Urgency, Reputation and Evolving. Accountability, therefore, can be explicit in organizational policies and practices in addition to being implicit in social norms and expectations (Frink & Klimoski, 2004).

Examining organizational accountability in a school system, Newman, King, Rigdon (1996), suggested that school accountability systems should include at least four parts:

1. Information about the organization's performance (e.g. standardized test scores);
2. Standards for judging the quality of success of the organization, such as comparisons between schools within the district and across districts;
3. Significant consequences for the organization (i.e. rewards and sanctions); and
4. An agent or constituency that receives information on organizational performance.

Researchers have also noted several benefits to organizational accountability such as it boots the quality of decision making, increases in deeper information processing and increases time and effort in decision making (Keplinger & Feldbauer-Durstmüller, 2023).

Reflection

Similar to Bustin's 7 Pillars of Accountability the Centre for Creative Leadership offers five steps for cultivating a culture of accountability: 1. Give support; 2. Provide freedom; 3. Give Information; 4. Provide support; 5. Be clear. Similar to Bustin's work the organization has a key role to play in ensuring the employees can deliver on clear expectations. Accountability is

therefore as much about ensuring employees achieve the stated goals as it is about leaders ensuring employees know what they are required to do and are supported in those responsibilities.

A second reflection comes from the repeated and consistent discussion in the literature on accountability about vision, mission and values. Accountability is about ensuring that every member of the organization understands the vision and has made a commitment to the mission. Disputes are likely to be much more easily resolved if everyone connects to the values of the organization.

A third reflection on accountability has to do with how schools as an organization can increase their levels of accountability. Standardized testing was one way to ensure schools were teaching the curriculum. In Ontario in elementary schools the standardized test is a measure of the curriculum. Unfortunately there is no consequence for poor performance and no consequence for high achievement. However, when schools perform poorly extra resources in both materials and human capital are applied to support low performing schools. I cannot help but wonder how scores might be improved if there was bonus pay for teachers who were able to move their students from good to great.

A fourth reflection I have is the importance of moving schools away from thinking about accountability as a source of punishment. It really is about a plan for success. Schools will benefit from learning conversations as they dig into the why behind low performance and the how of improvement.

Finally, I am intrigued by the common links in organizational accountability regardless of whether the article is investigating a school, hospitals or nonprofit organizations. This is truly affirming because it means that what we are learning about leadership can be applied to any context. We are not limited to the breadth of our current industry. Rather these principals of accountability apply to any organization.

Application

1. Principal Performance Appraisals.

In thinking about the principal evaluations I have to complete this year, I am wondering how I might support principals in developing their self-accountability. Some principals have challenges with time management, being clear with their staff about expectations and being willing to accept responsibility for their actions. As part of their appraisal I am giving some thought as to how I might improve their self-accountability.

This year I have 11 performance appraisals to complete. Two individuals are planning to retire, and two principals have also just arrived at new schools. Removing those four still leaves me with seven appraisals to complete. This is quite a daunting task but I will nevertheless add to the work load by building in a meeting in which I can discuss with the principals the goals they are trying to achieve and the goals the organization is hoping to achieve. I think the opportunity to be up front and clear about expectations will make the experience worthwhile and meaningful. It really isn't about shame and blame so another key component will entail asking how I can support them and assist in helping them achieve their goals

2. Pillars of Accountability Workshop

I would like to ensure that I support principals in creating cultures of accountability. Towards that aim I have developed a short workshop which I will present at the next Family of Schools Meeting to principals to introduce them to Bustin's 7 Pillars of Accountability. Everyone wants positive school cultures but few leaders know how to achieve it. Unless we explicitly teach it few will achieve it.

- Superintendent Performance Appraisal
- As a school superintendent I have had to identify my growth goals and my growth plan but there has not been a formal discussion on the matrix on which I will be evaluated. To be proactive and to avoid being held accountable for items I was not expecting I have been exploring evaluation systems such as John Wooden's Pyramid of Success and John Maxwell's 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader. I am using both of these systems to track my behavior and develop a user-friendly Likert scale to rate my abilities in specific areas.

Staff Accountability

Summary

Motivating staff to do things can be challenging because as Daniel Pink points out in *Drive*, it is not always about carrots and sticks. Furthermore, money isn't always a motivator. Common theories on how to motivate staff usually fall into two camps: motivation by fear or motivation for rewards. Daniel Pink suggests, however, that a better driver of motivation in the workplace are three things: autonomy, mastery and purpose. Leaders who want to increase staff motivation need to ensure that employees feel a sense of autonomy over the work they must do, have the opportunity to develop mastery and understand and buy into the purpose of the organization.

Shelly Cohen (2004), like Pink, notes that staff need a certain amount of freedom over their work if managers want to increase accountability. That has to be balanced with constantly clarifying expectations, engaging in regular check-ins, and addressing poor performance as soon as it occurs.

Ronald Picket suggests that a key way to increase staff accountability is to first begin by increasing staff levels of maturity. A mature staff member is one who takes responsibility for their actions. A good manager creates the conditions under which a staff member will assume responsibility for their behavior. Employees who are able to act in mature ways are also able to determine the best way in which to accomplish the goals of the organization and thus exhibit personal accountability.

Maturity might be a key driver for staff accountability because as Cohen notes, staff who feel that others have “gotten away” with something will also engage in maladaptive behavior. Another barrier to staff accountability is not addressing problematic behaviours in a timely manner. Bustin offers seven questions about underperformance. These questions are designed to determine the individual's value to the organization. A difficult choice for an organization to make is when to terminate under performers. Bustin (2014) offers seven questions to support this process and suggests that the best way to deal with underperformance is to avoid it by setting clear expectations at the outset. However, once it is evident that a staff is underperforming this has to be addressed because the leader's credibility is at stake. Staff will either think you have not noticed the problem or you are afraid to manage the issue. Both scenarios are detrimental to the leader. Leaders who fail to confront the behavior avoid confrontations for one of three reasons: 1. They want to be liked; 2. They suspect the poor performance will only be temporary; 3. The transgressing employee is of great value to the organization because of skills in other areas. In cases where individuals cannot change their faulty behavior Bustin (2014) suggests that you separate. The goal is usually to get your high performing staff back on track. Most leaders engage in a process where they revisit expectations, diagnose the problem and establish a timeframe for getting the employee back on track. At the end of this time the employee and the employer arrive at a crossroad where they will be faced with either a celebration or a separation.

Reflection (5)

The first item that resonates with me in regards to staff accountability is the fact that not all employees arrive with a built-in set of self-accountability tools. Even staff who want to do well can at times engage in actions that are detrimental to their success at the company. Further they might lack a complete understanding of how their behavior impacts others. Managers and supervisors must work hard to hire the best people which will go a long way toward having staff that want to do their best for the company.

A second reflection I have is that a leader must take immediate action when confronted with an employee who is underperforming. There is no benefit in waiting. As Bustin notes, poor performance is not like a fine wine, it will not get better with age. Poor performance must be addressed otherwise this will reflect poorly on the leader who will be seen as oblivious or afraid.

A third reflection I have concerns the barriers that can occur and block staff accountability. Cohen describes three: Unclear expectations, a reluctance to confront staff who are underperforming and staff who feel they should be allowed to do something because others are doing it. These actions all play a factor in blocking or reducing staff accountability.

In my field no one gets terminated because the powerful unions would not permit this. Unfortunately this means that there are many individuals who actually “quit but stay..” The unions protect their members. One positive from this is that much can be learned from the disgruntled workers who keep coming to work. These underperformers can help leaders unpack what happens when good employees turn bad. Is it an issue of skill or will? Many times employees who are underperforming were unclear about expectations but never shared this information with their supervisors or colleagues. This puts a fine point on the importance of

communication. Certainly this is an important area to devote some time. Can providing clear expectations and a solid road map support employees in moving from Point A to Point B? Can they be rehabilitated?

A fifth reflection I have comes from reading an article by Culture Partners, *What is Accountability in the Workplace?* This article suggests that employees must See It, Own It, Solve It, Do It (SOSD). This is a trademarked slogan with specific actions required at each stage. Employees work through a set of questions which promotes and ensures staff accountability. The questions include: What am I doing to contribute positively or negatively to current results? What results am I accountable for and by when? By working through these questions staff see themselves as both contributing to the problem and equally able to find a solution.

Application (3)

1. Confronting Underperformance

One thing that has been abundantly clear is the importance of confronting underperformance. My personal assistant is well meaning, well-intentioned but incompetent. I have been struggling with how to manage this situation for some time now. The main issues are frequent absences, incompetence, and a general inability to anticipate the needs of the superintendent. Having said all this she is quite a nice person but nice was not in the job description.

2. Seven Questions About Underperformance

To support me in addressing the challenges of the secretary's behavior I am going to use the seven questions about underperformance found on page 217.

3. The Stop Doing List

I suspect that it will not be easy for the secretary to improve her behavior, so I think a novel approach might help. With her help, I will co-construct a list of the on the job expectations as well as a list of things she should refrain from doing. I think she will appreciate this as it affirms that she is the kind of person who does too much. Of course the hidden message is that she does too much poorly.

Self Accountability

Summary

The decisions and actions individuals take impact the interests of others at social and individual levels (Dhiman, et al., 2018). This level of influence has to be engaged in with great responsibility and thoughtfulness when the individual is in a position of authority and power. Thus personal or self-accountability is critical for leaders whose actions have the potential to impact their organization, their clients or customers and their employees directly or indirectly.

Self-accountability occurs when an individual holds herself accountable for her own behaviors and the outcome of those behaviors (Dhiman, et al., 2018). According to *The Oz Principle*, as quoted by Culture Partners, “Only when you assume full accountability for your thoughts, feelings, actions, and results can you direct your own destiny; otherwise someone or something else will.” Generally when we think about self-accountability it is not limited to only taking responsibility for our actions, but rather it is about how we take inventory of our skill sets and develop our competencies in order to move from good to great. Thus, self-accountability is about taking ownership of our behavior and it also entails striving to become better in all aspects of our lives but in particular those areas, such as decision making, that impact others. Not surprisingly, in the literature self-accountability is often associated with good judgment and wisdom (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019). This may explain why self-accountability is thought to be a necessary precursor for good leadership.

Individuals with high levels of self-accountability might make better leaders because they usually exhibit the traits associated with organizational accountability. Using Bustin’s (2014) descriptor of high performing organizations you can draw a comparison to what the literature

reveals about leaders with high levels of self-accountability and find a direct comparison. For example, according to *BetterUp.com* self-accountability includes taking responsibility for your actions and behaviors without blaming others, fulfilling your obligations, and goals without excuses, and being solution driven when problems arise. This is very similar to the messages found in Bustin's Urgency Pillar. High performing organizations identify a few key priorities, they place a laser-like focus on achieving those priorities and remove or reduce any red tape that might hinder success. When things go wrong, they immediately set out to find solutions, not scapegoats.

Having a high level of self-accountability is not only good for the organization you serve, it is also good for you in the long run. *BetterUp.com* indicates that individuals with high levels of self-accountability have greater self-awareness which makes it easier to manage emotions. Additionally people with high levels of self-accountability are better at goal setting, prioritizing their time and working productively to achieve goals. High levels of self-accountability results in a growth mindset. Carol Dweck's work on growth mindset has demonstrated how powerful this is for accomplishing goals, trying new things and improving performance. Growth mindset can actually contribute to learning more and having more experiences because it allows you to feel a sense of confidence in your endeavors. Finally motivation as seen in Daniel Pink's book *Drive* is highly available to those with high levels of self-accountability. The success of one accomplishment can provide the momentum and motivation to try other tasks. This recursive process can fuel the individual into tackling more goals but most significantly, it might contribute to positive feelings of confidence in the face of adversity. Instead of doubt, leaders with high self-accountability might instead feel possibility and hope.

Reflection

One thing I have noted is the thread that links all the books in the course together. As we discuss self-accountability the importance of *Dare to Lead*, *Drive* and *Mindset* come to mind. These three books focus on the individual in three distinct ways: values, motivation and beliefs. If you need to grow yourself these are the building blocks that can support your journey and in the process you are likely to build your competencies in responsibility, accountability and integrity which are integral to good leadership.

A second reflection I have comes from reading an article by Culture Partners, *What is Accountability in the Workplace?* This article suggests that employees must See It, Own It, Solve It, Do It (SOSD). This is a trademarked slogan with specific actions required at each stage. Employees work through a set of questions which promotes and ensures staff accountability. The questions include: What am I doing to contribute positively or negatively to current results? What results am I accountable for and by when? By working through these questions staff see themselves as both contributing to the problem and equally able to find a solution.

A third reflection I have on self-accountability comes from the Centre for Creative Leadership which offers five steps for cultivating a culture of accountability: 1. Give support; 2. Provide freedom; 3. Share information; 4. Provide resources 5. Be clear. Similar to Bustin's work the organization has a key role to play in ensuring the employees can deliver on clear expectations. Accountability is therefore as much about ensuring employees achieve the stated goals as it is about leaders ensuring employees know what they are required to do and are supported in those responsibilities.

A fourth reflection I have comes directly from Bustin's Pledge of Accountability found on page 266 in the Appendix. This pledge really sets up the employee for success and provides the supervisor with a starting point to address poor performance should it occur. When the employee considers what is required of them as they are onboarding, they can also consider how they will fulfill the pledge. This might make the employee engage in more intentional behavior to ensure success and a willingness to speak up in times of uncertainty. When behavior falls short of expectations, the supervisor can begin with a revisit of the Pledge of Accountability.

Application

1. Principal Performance Appraisals (PPA)

Since self-accountability allows individuals to achieve at higher levels and places an emphasis on continuous improvement toward a goal it seems reasonable that there should be some focus placed on improving and sustaining self-accountability. There is an opportunity to add a Self-accountability index to the PPA process. This might be in the form of survey questions or it might involve an interview to discuss key elements of self-accountability such as goal setting and exploring beliefs and values.

2. Workshop on Self-Accountability

Self-accountability is a key driver for performance so it may be helpful to develop a workshop on self-accountability. Core textbooks would be *Drive*, *Dare to Lead* and *Mindset*.

3. Self-Accountability Screener for Hiring

Throughout Bustin's book *Accountability* many leaders from high performing organizations indicated that it is important to start with the right people. While everyone might agree with this statement, it is nevertheless challenging to make it so. One thing that might help is a screener to

help ensure that individuals with high levels of accountability are considered for hiring while those with lower levels are not.

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Group Book Presentations

Summary

Adam Grant's *Think Again* begins with a compelling story that illustrates conclusively that humans will perish if they do not have the ability to engage in rethinking. The narrative that Grant recounts draws the reader in to learn about the Mann Gulch fire of 1949. The fire raged in the Montana wilderness along the Missouri river. Fifteen smokejumpers were brought in to fight the fire but tragically only 3 survived. Wagner Dodge, who was the captain of the crew, realized in the midst of fighting the fire that the only way to survive was to set another fire. Yes! Set another fire and breathe the oxygen that would be created once that fire burnt down. Dodge tried to signal to his team what he was doing and he also encouraged them to do the same.

Unfortunately when Dodge's crew saw what he was doing it was so far from their expected practice that they could not imitate his actions. This inability to re-think under stress ultimately cost the team their lives. Under acute stress people revert to their automatic well learned responses.

Even more tragic than the team's lack of reaction to Dodge's action was the task itself. Fighting fires is dangerous and should only be considered when the fire might spread and endanger wildlife, human lives, or property. Not every fire has to be extinguished. Fires serve a valuable purpose in the life cycle of forests. The Mann Gulch fire occurred in the wilderness and therefore did not need to be fought. Because of the Mann Gulch fire and others, the U. S. Forest Service has done some rethinking and now recognizes that not all fires need to be extinguished.

The purpose of Grant's book is not only to encourage readers to rethink, it is also about how we inspire others to do the same. This is significant for those of us in leadership or heading towards leadership.

Rethinking is a valuable approach to life when we find ourselves needing to think on our feet and respond to situations in the moment. At such times we usually approach life in one of three ways: as a preacher, a prosecutor or politician. As the preacher, we give sermons when we think our beliefs are in jeopardy. When we engage with others as a prosecutor it is when we try to prove others wrong. It may be because there is a flaw in their reasoning and we move in. In the politician's role we are trying to win over people. While these three roles are what we naturally fall to, the best option is to approach life as a scientist.

Unfortunately people are reluctant to engage in rethinking because of cognitive laziness, or because they are stuck in "the ways things were always done."

Grant also discusses the Dunning-Kruger effect in regards to the overconfident- low competence individual. The Dunning-Kruger effect occurs when a person's lack of competence and skill in a particular area causes them to overestimate their abilities. Contrary to this is what researchers call the Imposter Syndrome.

Grant posits that there is no shame in being wrong, in fact we should try to find joy in being wrong. Once we realize we are wrong about something we are free to find the truth. And being willing to admit to our wrongs makes us better people because it is a display of honesty and a willingness to learn.

Grant explores how conflict can actually be beneficial for rethinking. He contrasts Task Conflict with Relationship Conflict. They are not the same nor do they have the same impact on people in the workplace. Task conflict can actually be good for performance. It is linked to

higher levels of creativity and smarter choices. Relationship conflict, however, is less positive and can lead to workplace stress and contribute to a toxic work environment.

As an example of a successful team that suffered from severe conflict, but had great creativity and productivity, Grant offers the Wright brothers. In the race to have the first flight, these brothers rarely agreed. They were able to stay friends and business partners because they kept focussed on the task and not on each other.

Reflection

This book has arrived at the right time for the world that we live in post-pandemic and in the midst of wars fueled by greed and genocides resulting from egos. The world needs to stop and rethink, because the way we interact and work with each other is not working. Now more than at any other time in history we see the clash of competing rights, playing out not only in the Middle East and Europe, but also in our classrooms and playgrounds. A possible solution to all of this is what Think Again is offering. Keep an open mind, challenge assumptions and replace beliefs with what you value.

A second reflection I have is that what I have noticed is that the smartest most successful people are those that have an open mind and embrace difference. They are willing to challenge their own beliefs and embrace being corrected. I have never seen anyone delight in being wrong, but I have always loved the invitational phrase, “correct me *if* I am wrong.” That to me speaks to the desire not to be right but rather to seek the truth. *Correct me* might be synonymous with *lead me*. That’s a phrase I can get behind.

A third reflection I have concerns the use of the scientific mode as a way to challenge

assumptions and move away from bias in our behaviors. If we could move into a more scientific approach we would be in search of the truth. As scientists we would embrace the differences we encounter with an open mind not a closed belief system. In the science mode, we would not preach from intuition but rather we would teach from evidence.

A fourth reflection I have concerns the rethinking cycle. You start with humility as you recognize your shortcomings which leads you to doubt. As we question our current understanding we become curious about what we don't know and that can lead us to new discoveries. When we think like scientists we engage in humility instead of pride, doubt over certainty and curiosity over closure. Contrary to the Rethinking Cycle is the Overconfidence Cycle. It begins with pride which leads to conviction which makes us prosecutors. Unfortunately, when we use this cycle of thinking, we focus on changing other people's minds without adjusting our own.

A fifth concept from the book that resonated with me was the imposter Syndrome. Women and racialized people underestimate their skills while men overestimate their skills. While the Imposter Syndrome is often portrayed as a challenge to overcome Grant flips the switch on this and suggests that there are three key benefits of the Imposter Syndrome:

1. It motivates us to work harder because confidence can make us complacent.
2. It motivates us to work smarter because we engage in rethinking and question our assumptions.
3. We become better learners because we have doubts about our skills.

Application

1. School Improvement Meetings

As part of my responsibilities as a school superintendent I visit schools in various parts of our district and have conversations primarily about student achievement with school administrators. In the past I have enjoyed oscillating between the three stances: Preacher, Prosecutor and Politician, depending on what I wanted to accomplish. I was happy to walk-in as a prosecutor when it was brought to my attention, usually by an angry parent, that the principal had failed in some regard to follow policy. I have also been happy to be a preacher when I wanted the administrators to do something for the kids. Most recently Halloween was a point of contention.

Halloween is one of my favorite special occasions and in some of our rural areas our students live on farms and trick-or-treating door to door is not an experience they can have. The only Halloween celebration they will have is what they experience at school. The district distributed intentional vague guidance to principals so that they could do what they thought would best serve their community. In one rural school with a 90% Mennonite population the students wanted candy and I agreed. The principal thought something different and I used my best preaching to bring him around. I don't think I did. In retrospect I think the scientific approach would have served me better.

2. Professional Development Training

As soon as I read Adam Grant's twist on the Imposter Syndrome I had the workings for a new presentation that is scheduled for November 28th to aspiring leaders. When I agreed to present to the group of future leaders I did so for two reasons. First, I generally say "yes" whenever I am asked to do something, especially if it will help others succeed. Second, I would like to become a public speaker. When I think about what I want to do with my PhD, what comes to mind most

often is the idea to serve and support others. I would like to speak not only at large conferences presenting research, but also for small organizations, private businesses and groups that are looking to learn more, achieve more and live on Turtle Island with greater joy, harmony and compassion. So I agreed to present without any idea about what I would discuss. When I hit chapter two in *Think Again*, I knew exactly what I wanted to speak about: Five Myths of Leadership and Why they Matter.

One of the myths I am going to debunk is the Imposter Syndrome and instead of describing why it is bad and harmful I am going to focus on the benefits as presented in *Think Again* and expand on it. The Imposter Syndrome has never resonated with me. I have worked hard for every position I received. Nothing came to me without great effort and even greater sacrifice. I had to give up a lot, to go up. When I landed in the jobs I had, I never one day felt I did not belong. I never once felt like I did not have the skills or competencies required to be successful. I never doubted myself, but I was often scared. To this day I wake up every morning and thank God for the opportunity I have been given and I ask for guidance to keep students centered in my decision making and I ask for wisdom so that I can lead others in a manner that will help them become their best selves.

3. Interpersonal Relationships and Problem Solving

I think I am a different person now after reading *Think Again*. I can feel the shift in my thinking and my mind is quite a bit more open than it was in September. I know I will use the scientist stance more often in communicating my ideas, probing the ideas of others and in my general encounters with news media and social media.

In addition, I have new tools to approach problem solving with parents and principals. I often have to resolve conflicts or support others in navigating tense and emotionally charged

situations. *Think Again* offers some unique approaches that I think will be helpful in negotiations. For example, based on the research presented, I will focus more on asking good questions rather than telling everyone my ideas or what the policy says. It is better for me to approach contentious meetings with humility rather than pride and focus on finding a common ground rather than engaging in a defensive stance. I also like the idea of asking someone in an opposing position: What would change your mind? I love this question because it takes me off the hook of having to argue like a prosecutor to hammer my point into the opposing side and it requires that the opponent conceptualize what they are after. This can serve to move the situation forward into a solution driven conversation rather than a heated debate.

Final Summary and Take Aways

There is a high cost to pay in organizations where there is a lack of accountability. Leaders must look at themselves first to ensure they are demonstrating three essential traits: personal accountability, responsibility and integrity. Leaders can sometimes unknowingly send messages to employees that condone acts such as tardiness, absenteeism and poor work ethic by modeling these behaviors or ignoring them when they occur in staff.

When managing staff, accountability should always be about starting off on the right foot with clear directions, expectations that are understood and reasonable goals outlined. It is not a tool that comes out when things go wrong. It is out all the time supporting staff to become the best they can and do the most they can in an effort to achieve whatever has been identified as the goal. This course demonstrated that accountability can be an effective way of measuring success and ensuring a positive climate and culture in an organization. However, a positive and productive organization must also invest in employees and this can begin with having good relationships.

Individuals must have opportunities to engage in purposeful work and feel valued by the organization. Employees have an important role to play in the organization's success and on their own.

The Centre for Creative Leadership which offers five steps for cultivating a culture of accountability: 1. Give support; 2. Provide freedom; 3. Share information; 4. Provide resources 5. Be clear. Similar to Bustin's work the organization has a key role to play in ensuring the employees can deliver on clear expectations. Accountability is therefore as much about ensuring employees achieve the stated goals as it is about leaders ensuring employees know what they are required to do and are supported in those responsibilities

Reflection

Perhaps the most important take away from *Accountability* is found in Chapter 8. Accountability is affection not punishment. All too often accountability has been the tool used after staff fail to achieve KPI. Bustin flips this and makes a very compelling case for how to use accountability as a tool to achieve the KPIs. By starting tasks with a strong sense of purpose, a defined goal, clear expectations and support for achievement.

A second reflection comes from the repeated and consistent discussion in the literature on accountability about vision, mission and values. Accountability is about ensuring that every member of the organization understands the vision and has made a commitment to the mission. Disputes are likely to be much more easily resolved if everyone connects to the values of the organization.

A third reflection I have is the importance of moving schools away from thinking about accountability as a source of punishment. It really is about a plan for success. Schools will benefit from learning conversations as they dig into the why behind low performance and the how of improvement.

A fourth point of reflection is the importance of creating a sense of urgency. Urgency as defined as placing a laser-like focus on a few priorities, with reduced red tape and a willingness to correct mistakes quickly is a compelling process for creating action plans that actually get launched. Many organizations often get lost in the weeds of planning and execution remains far out of reach. Steven Katz, author of *Quality Implementation*, notes the challenges schools and systems have in launching initiatives. There are a number of factors that interfere with quality implementation and certainly red tape is one. I witnessed first hand the number of barriers intended and unintended that interfere with how initiatives are implemented as well as what gets implemented. We need to have a bias for action much more could be accomplished in A fifth

take away I have is that individuals with high levels of accountability are likely to be easier to manage. They will set goals for themselves in relation to the goals of the organization.

Furthermore when challenges arise the highly accountable individual is likely to do whatever it takes to improve the situation. Perhaps if there was a screening tool for self-accountability that might be added to the hiring process to ensure organizations begin with the right people.

Application

1. A second point of reflection comes from Chapter 9 and the discussion on the Culture Crashers.

The list that Bustin provides reflects all of the challenging individuals I have encountered and a few that I have not met. One missing character is the Naysayer. That is the individual who doubts that something can be done to improve things. They doubt new policies, procedures, the new leader and even a new book. The Naysayer can be toxic in a work environment and the doubt displayed only yields to the equally damaging, “that can’t work here”. The behaviors exhibited by employees whether they show up as the Control Freak or the Joker, must be managed. As a leader you cannot ignore destructive behavior otherwise it undermines your credibility. Bustin makes it clear that as a leader “you get the behavior you tolerate.”

2; School Improvement Meetings

As part of my responsibilities as a school superintendent I visit schools in various parts of our district and have conversations primarily about student achievement with school administrators. In the past I have enjoyed oscillating between the three stances: Preacher, Prosecutor and Politician, depending on what I wanted to accomplish. I was happy to walk-in as a prosecutor when it was brought to my attention, usually by an angry parent, that the principal had failed in some regard to follow policy. I have also been happy to be a preacher when I wanted the

administrators to do something for the kids. Most recently Halloween was a point of contention.

4. The Iceberg Conversation

As we are moving toward the winter break there is still a great deal of hope and optimism in the air. I know teachers are excited about the progress made so far and principals are hopeful that the scores will go up. However the harsh reality is that winter is long and cold. As soon as our students stop progressing in the ways we anticipated people begin to lose faith in the operating strategy. My plan is to use many of the questions found on page 220 in my coaching conversations. I like the first question: How would you describe the situation? This requires reflection, description and analysis. I also like the last question: What can I do to help you achieve the expected results? This is an important question because it speaks to the fact that accountability is not about blame and shame, it is about clear expectations, defined goals and a supportive plan to ensure we move from Point A to Point B.

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