



Personal Accountability

Have you noticed how some team members always justify/ignore their underperformance? Or never admit responsibility for a project failing? How about those who constantly blame anybody/everybody else for a deadline missed?

If you could relate to these questions – Congratulations! You have just recognised the typical symptoms people with little or no personal accountability show.

People who have personal accountability are able to recognise, accept and take full ownership of tasks/projects that squarely fall into their area of responsibility. This includes any results they contribute towards or create. When something doesn't work out, or deadlines are not met, these are the people who look at themselves first to see how they affected the end result. They do not blame others or the situation; rather they think about their input and focus on avoiding the same mistakes in the future.

Conversely you will know people who don't. These are the people who tend to waste valuable time and effort by uttering excuses, 'passing the buck' and ultimately avoiding any blame for the mishap/missed deadline or a project that has gone wrong. These people also engage fully in the name/shame/blame game. They very quickly point the finger at someone else who worked on the project – with no hesitation at all.

By now, you will be recognising people you; either know personally, or work with closely. My sincere condolences in advance if you are in a relationship with them!!

So what can we do to elevate personal accountability (as a skill) to a higher level within your organisation? Perhaps begin by recognising how this manifests in your place of work.

The following questions give a simple lead in from a 'self' viewpoint, which builds some awareness and can position you nicely to observe where others in your teams lie on the continuum.

- When things go wrong do you naturally look to yourself first or immediately blame others?
- When you realise you are at fault, do you own this fully or start to justify your position?
- Do you take action to 'make this right' or do you focus on other's underperformance?
- Do you intuitively know you are wrong and own this or do you project blame as soon as possible?
- If you see someone else is at fault do you publicise this or take them aside to discuss further?

It is helpful to note what your responses were. This microscopic look at your own personal accountability, will start the thinking needed to take action to improve/work on your own areas for improvement, so that you can be more effective at managing your teams' ones.

Now let's look at the scenario where someone in your team doesn't have personal accountability.

This needs to be dealt with and quickly, because it can become contagious. The good news is that when most of the team are personally accountable – there tends to be more of a focus on moving ahead to perform at top levels. This is an important skill that helps everyone in any workplace including yours.

Some potential spinoffs for you if your Company/team develops this skill further are:

1. They will become more adept at identifying the right action to take.
2. There will be a zero tolerance for blame being projected onto others.
3. There will be much less/no procrastinating.
4. They will minimise/delete the 'poor me' mentality from any task.
5. There will be more encouragement given towards tasks performed.
6. There will be more personal responsibility taken to achieve targets and results - instead of focusing on how much others may/may not be contributing to the project.
7. There will be a tendency to interact more effectively with those around them.
8. Challenges and deadlines will be accepted in a more positive light

If you don't believe in personal accountability/don't rate it as necessary in your place of work, you could be doing yourself and your team a disservice, because the following happens when Personal Accountability is **not** part of the Company Culture.

- Team morale is lowered leading to reduced productivity.
- Poor organisational performance dominates; leading to
- Lowered motivational levels, underperformance and ultimately an increased attrition rate.

So, what can you do to help build this very important skill so that your employees/team members are functioning at high levels, feeling motivated and working as a cohesive unit? Some ideas might be:

- Hold meetings and conversations about the importance of personal accountability with your team members.
- Lead by example by demonstrating personal accountability in your actions and behaviours at work.
- Challenge others on their lack of personal accountability.
- Create opportunity for individuals to 'grow' their personal accountability.
- Create an incentive scheme based on personal accountability – there are a myriad of ways to do this. (Contact me for further information)
- Organise a workshop on personal accountability for your team. (See outline below)

For the people who exhibit little/no personal accountability, recognise that their rationale is to blame others for a job poorly done because it is easier than owning their part in it. A common factor is their inability/unwillingness to see if/how they did contribute. A way forward would be to work with them one on one, alongside publicly giving acknowledgement to individuals who do 'own' the problem, or accept partial responsibility for it. This can potentially 'grow' the acceptance that getting it wrong is okay as long as it doesn't happen regularly and is learned from spontaneously.

When working one on one, it is very important that you **Do Not Make It Your Problem**, and allow them to accept the problem belongs to them. This is an instrumental first step in growing personal accountability. The following could be a good lead in for the one on one approach:

- Arrange a formal meeting to discuss the issue further.
- Ask what the problem is/is there a reason for this/what has led to this etc.
- Ask what they are prepared to do about it.
- Make them accountable by following up - e.g.,
- Call a meeting for a week's time to comment on the difference/not that you have noticed.
- Be available to them - regarding this (open door policy works best).
- Acknowledge progress made early on – what we give energy to grows.
- Do not allow it to build up again, at the first sign of slipping back to old ways – **manage it by:**
- Not bemoaning the fact it is happening again, and taking action.
- Dealing with them the way you would a recalcitrant child.
- Offering guidance/support if the situation is not changing through continued mentoring or calling in an external professional.

If you have a more serious issue, i.e.; the Recidivist offender - you will need to mentor them strongly and consistently through this. They will not change/ see no need to change unless you 'make an issue of it' and take them aside to change their thinking on it. Beginning with pointing out that what they failed to do was always part of their job description is useful; another possible step would be to discuss with them how their lack of motivation/integrity in accepting their responsibility is unprofessional and therefore disappointing. Showing them that 'being wrong' or not meeting targets is 'human' but if this continues – they will need to work with you on (for example) smaller/weekly targets as opposed to monthly. This could be productive in shifting the 'failure' part of personal accountability which could be a contributing factor for its existence in the first place. A possible rationale for this could be that no-one wants to be seen to have failed/not come up to the mark in some way, we all want to be seen as at least capable of, if not bigger than, better than, more able than.... and what happens if that doesn't manifest can be feelings of guilt, hopelessness, being stuck, anger and ultimately leading to don't care attitude = lack of personal accountability.

As you can see, I could write another article on the whys and wherefores of personal accountability being the issue it is in our workplaces today, but what is important in this article is simple. You must manage the problem by following through and holding people to account for their actions/lack of them – otherwise where is your personal accountability?

Please contact me if you would like my involvement in assisting you with team member/s who lack personal accountability.

By Gloria Masters

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