

Mike Evans

ACHIEVE

WITH

ACCOUNTABILITY



Ignite
Engagement,
Ownership,
Perseverance,
Alignment,
& Change

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In today's complex, highly competitive, global environment, those who will survive and thrive in this new world of work are individuals, teams, and organizations who can maintain high levels of accountability and remain focused on must-achieve desired results. *Achieve with Accountability* is your personal handbook for awakening your (or your team or organization's) inner confidence, drive, perseverance, determination, resolve, and can-do mindset. It will hone your skills and capacity to achieve what matters most.

Discover what impels top-performing individuals, teams, and organizations to excel, thrive, and achieve their most desired results. Let leadership expert Mike Evans show you how to awaken and release from in you, your team, and your organization the discretionary performance that resides within, but is often left untapped. Transform accountability into an engaging, upbeat, positive, forward looking experience that will secure you, your team, and your organization a position in the new world of work.

- Cultivate resiliency, agility, and steely resolve
- Boost collaboration, teamwork, and camaraderie
- Crumble silos and abolish territorialism
- Establish unshakable trust and credibility
- Obliterate excuse-making and the blame-game
- Invigorate ownership, engagement, and alignment
- Unleash creativity and a focus on solutions

As Mike Evans explains, when you abdicate accountability you relinquish control of your destiny and place your fate in the hands of other people and events. Without fluff, hyperbole, rhetoric, or complicated models, *Achieve with Accountability* reveals how individuals, teams, and organizations adopt and nourish the focus, determination, resolve, and perseverance needed to achieve what is most important. Complacency and the status quo are the death-knell to individuals, teams, and organizations.

This must-have resource reveals how to develop the agility, flexibility, and resiliency to flourish in today's unpredictable world of constant change. The author details how to cultivate "both individually and organizationally"

a resolute, whatever it takes, mindset to capitalize on opportunities and to overcome challenges, barriers, and obstacles. This essential guide arms you with an easily implemented game plan to eradicate the blame-game and vanquish the excuse making that stifles optimal performance. Learn how to embrace and instill a solutions focus even in the face of obstructions, impediments, and difficulties.

You will learn how to extinguish the toxic peak-performance inhibitors of apathy, cynicism, entitlement, indifference, disarray, discomfort, and despair. *Achieve with Accountability* equips individuals, teams, and organizations with the keys to take control of their destiny to achieve what matters most.

Use *Achieve with Accountability* as your guide to apply the accountability fundamentals that have allowed thousands of individuals, teams, and organizations to achieve and exceed their desired results.



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MIKE EVANS is the Executive Vice President of QuestMark. He has served in senior leadership and consulting roles with Kotter International, FranklinCovey, and Tom Peters Company. He has developed a unique perspective from working

alongside a star studded list of world-renowned thought leaders, including Dr. John Kotter, Dr. Stephen Covey, Tom Peters, Jim Kouzes, Hyrum Smith, Steve Farber and Chris McChesney. He consults with senior teams, delivers keynote speeches, facilitates custom workshops and provides coaching and consulting on a variety of subject areas, including Personal and Organizational Accountability, Change Leadership, Culture Shaping, Flawless Execution and Exemplary Leadership.

www.questmarkcompany.com

www.achievetwithaccountability.com

HOW CAN YOU, YOUR TEAM, AND YOUR ORGANIZATION EXCEL AND ACHIEVE WHAT MATTERS MOST?

As business, technology, and society itself continue to evolve at an ever more rapid pace, we are often confounded by the no-rules business environment, where the fast, flexible and agile will eat and spit out the slow, over-thinking and complacent. *Achieve with Accountability* takes an engaging narrative approach through stories that teach how to unleash your individual, team's, and organization's optimal performance.

"*Achieve with Accountability* focuses on the principle that fits hand and glove with what I have spent most of my career teaching in the time and life management field, and that is the mindset of owning your life, owning your mistakes, owning your goals and owning your choices. . .Mike claims that you can 'transform accountability into a positive experience that can catapult your team and business to new heights, and achieve what matters most', and he is absolutely right."

—**Hyrum Smith**, co-founder, FranklinCovey and co-founder, 3Gaps

"A great read for anyone who wants to push the boundaries of personal, team or organizational performance. Mike demystifies accountability in a way that lowers the barriers to achievement."

—**Alan Fine**, bestselling author of *You Already Know How To Be Great* and Founder/President of InsideOut Development LLC

"During the many years, I've known Mike Evans, I have found him to be a real 'cut to the chase and let's make it simple' sort of a fellow. The groundbreaking work in this book clearly illustrates that point. In it, Evans dissects optimum human performance to its very foundation of accountability. For without it, there is only poor performance, sub-optimal performance or literally no performance at all. There is truly no 'reason to be'. Mike provides the readers with a prescription for optimal individual, team and organizational performance."

—**Al Adams**, Former Executive Vice President, Tom Peters Company

"This work brings to life Mike's depth of understanding and work with organizations and the people who comprise them. A masterful leader and change agent, Mike unravels 'accountability,' through insight, questioning, and execution models leading to high performance. A must read for those who want to excel and keep their organizations competitive."

—**Phyllis Moore**, Former Senior Vice President, Kotter International

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The Author

Mike Evans has developed a unique perspective from working alongside a star-studded list of world-renowned thought leaders, including Dr. John Kotter, Dr. Stephen Covey, Tom Peters, Jim Kouzes, Hyrum Smith, Steve Farber, and Chris McChesney.

Mike served in senior leadership and consulting roles with Kotter International, FranklinCovey, and Tom Peters Company.

In addition to unleashing personal and organizational accountability, clients rely upon Mike's solutions to ***Accelerate Change, Shape Their Optimal Culture, Flawlessly Execute Key Strategies, Ignite Leadership Capacity at All Levels, and Amplify Employee Engagement***.

He consults with senior teams, facilitates custom workshops, delivers keynote speeches, and provides coaching and consulting on all of these subject areas.

Mike has worked with organizations in virtually every arena, from the tech sector to financial services, manufacturing, health care, hospitality, entertainment, retail, and the US government. Clients include: Intel, Capital One, Apple, BP, BNY Mellon, Pfizer, The United States Navy, Fidelity Investments, Johnson & Johnson, Symantec, Cigna Corporation, Oracle, Astra Zeneca, Baxter International Inc., Shell Oil, Cargill, American Airlines, DuPont USA, and NASA.

His personal mission is to help individuals, teams, and organizations accelerate their ability to achieve more than they ever believed possible. Clients describe him as inspiring, motivating, and a ball of energy with an unequaled focus and passion for helping them achieve their desired results.

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The logo features the word "QuestMark" in a serif font, with "Quest" in italics and "Mark" in a standard weight. The text is set against a light gray, pennant-shaped background that tapers to a point on the right. A horizontal line is positioned below the "Mark" portion of the text.

*Quest*Mark

Achieve Desired Results

Resources, Solutions, and Workshops

There is a reason that “accountability” continues to top the critical needs list of most organizational leaders. These leaders are keenly aware that accountability is the essential ingredient that allows individuals, teams, and organizations to soar and leave the competition in their wake.

Accountability helps individuals, teams, and organizations

- ◆ Develop the agility, flexibility, and resiliency to adapt to constant change
- ◆ Adopt a can-do, solutions focus and resolute mindset in the face of difficult challenges, obstacles, and barriers
- ◆ Eradicate the blame-game and excuse-making that stifles peak performance
- ◆ Strengthen collaboration and teamwork
- ◆ Shed feelings of disarray, discomfort, apathy, entitlement, cynicism, and despair
- ◆ Cultivate a sense of control over your circumstances to achieve what matters most
- ◆ Establish unshakable trust and credibility
- ◆ Unleash voluntary contributions of discretionary performance that is often left untapped in individuals, teams, and organizations
- ◆ Stimulate creativity and innovation
- ◆ Flawlessly execute crucial strategies
- ◆ Galvanize alignment and ownership
- ◆ Ignite a desire to learn, grow, and improve

If you are interested in creating a highly accountable team or organization, **Mike and QuestMark offer the following options and solutions:**

Speaking: Bring Mike Evans into your organization, your conference, or offsite event to keynote on: Accountability, Change

Leadership, Culture Shaping, Exemplary Leadership, Flawless Execution, or Employee Engagement

Workshops: Schedule an interactive, half-day, one-day, or multiple-day onsite custom workshop for your team or organization:

- Cultivate a Highly Accountable Team
- Leading and Accelerating Change
- Creating Your Optimal Culture
- Flawless Execution—Achieve What Matters Most
- Unleash Exemplary Leadership Capacity at All Levels

Consulting: Hire Evans and QuestMark to advise, counsel, and coach your team. Integrate proven and pragmatic models, tools, methodologies, and principles into your leadership repertoire to supplement and enhance your current efforts.

To Learn More Visit: www.questmarkcompany.com or contact mike.evans@questmarkcompany.com

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Achieve Desired Results

Preface: Taking Accountability

If Not You, Who?

Accountability continues to be a topic high on the list of interests of executives and organizational leaders. What we find more interesting is that accountability is just as high on the list of what employees want from their peers. Everyone wants more!

Accountability is the catalyst to accelerated change, robust employee engagement, intensified ownership, relentless perseverance, impeccable alignment, and it propels individuals, teams, and organizations to intoxicating heights of achievement and success.

Accountability crumbles silos, boosts teamwork and collaboration, strengthens camaraderie, creativity, resiliency, agility, trust, and communication.

Achieve with Accountability presents a recipe for awakening the *belief, resolve, confidence, perseverance, determination, can-do mindset, whatever-it-takes attitude, esprit de corps, drive, and creativity* to achieve what matters most to individuals, teams, and organizations. Discover how to transform accountability into a positive, engaging, and forward-looking experience that will secure your position in the new world of work. Learn how to kick-start a revolution to achieve what matters most.

Why Accountability?

We are in a brawl with few rules, where the fast, flexible, and agile will eat and spit out the slow, over-thinking, and complacent. In the past, change was episodic, transient, and gradual; now, change is constant as business, technology, and society itself continue to evolve at an ever more rapid pace. Individuals, teams, and organizations that fail to adapt will find themselves vulnerable, uncomfortable, and at the mercy of other people, events, or the competition.

With the world coming at you fast and furious every day, it is easy to feel like you have lost control of your life, your team, or your organization. By choosing to *take* and *lead* accountability, you reclaim control and are able to direct your own destiny, as well as the fate of your team or organization. Accountability is a current that feeds into the slipstream of success. Your performance, your decisions, and your results are all within your control; when you operate from that premise, magic happens. You deliver like never before because you are personally invested in the outcome. *Achieve with Accountability* shows you how to nourish that can-do mindset so that you can start achieving what matters most. Accountability helps individuals, teams, and organizations

- ◆ Develop the agility, flexibility, and resiliency to adapt to constant change
- ◆ Adopt a can-do, solutions focus, and resolute mindset in the face of difficult challenges, obstacles, and barriers
- ◆ Eradicate the blame-game and excuse-making that stifles peak performance
- ◆ Strengthen collaboration and teamwork
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- ◆ Stimulate creativity and innovation
- ◆ Flawlessly execute crucial strategies
- ◆ Galvanize alignment and ownership
- ◆ Ignite a desire to learn, grow, and improve

Individuals, teams, and organizations that are mired in the blame-game, self-pity, excuse-making, cynicism, complacency, and apathy, and that lack alignment, engagement, and ownership to achieve what matters most, are in jeopardy. When you relinquish

accountability, you place your future in the hands of fate. It is only by taking accountability and ownership for our circumstances that we can achieve what matters most. Today is the day to start owning your situation and take control—to orchestrate and realize the future you want.

Start believing in you, your team, and your organization. Embrace the accountability fundamentals that have helped individuals, teams, and organizations for years to achieve and reach beyond what they had believed was possible. The race is about to begin. Don't miss the starting gun while wallowing in the blame-game.

What Is Instigating the Call for More Accountability?

There are myriad reasons individuals, teams, and organizations crave more accountability. Some that are listed below may strike close to home. What would you add to the list? What realities are you, your team, or organization faced with right now that heightened levels of accountability would be the ideal prescription?

Increased Competition	Commoditization
New Technologies	Increased Shareholder Demand
Pressure to Innovate	Shrinking Margins
Globalization	Talent Wars
Economic Downturns	Penetrating New Markets
Nonstop Change	Doing More with Less
Regulations/Legislation	Expansion
Brand/Reputation Management	Political Uncertainty

Winning in the New World of Work

For many of the reasons cited above, Beth and her leadership team of nine were always looking for a competitive advantage. So the opportunity to attend a forum with a world-renown authority was a no-brainer. Almost immediately, this guru captivated Beth's team.

He started with passion and energy, "The interplay of unstoppable forces that are creating the 'Perfect Storm' in the deep waters of commerce will sink organizations and individuals that are ill prepared, or that lose focus on what they have identified as most important.

“The white waters of change are unnerving for many. But the fact is they will only become more turbulent. For organizations and employees who are unprepared, the future will be devastating.

“The need for increased levels of personal and organizational accountability has never been higher. And that need will expand daily.

“Consider:

1. There are companies and entrepreneurs at this moment looking to reinvent the way your business is done. How many bookstores were wiped out because of Amazon.com? What happened to Kodak? Blockbuster? Sears? Woolworth's? Nokia? Rest assured there are some college students ensconced in a dorm room somewhere about to revolutionize your industry.
2. How many jobs have been expunged, teams eliminated, and firms driven to extinction due to ERP, SAP, the Internet, or White-Collar Robots (e.g., Cash Machines). Blue-collar robots came and triumphed. Are you, your team, and your company confident that the value you exhibit outweighs these options? What are you doing to take accountability for your future success?
3. MIT's No. 1 computer guru, Michael Dertuzos, said not long ago that India could easily boost its GDP by a *trillion* dollars in the next few years. How? By performing “backroom” white-collar tasks for Western companies. He estimated that fifty million (white-collar) jobs could be sucked from the West and transplanted to India, at less than half the cost. What are you doing to take accountability to make certain one of those jobs is not yours in the future?
4. It took thirty-eight years for the radio to get to fifty million users. The Internet got there in four years. Change is coming at us faster than ever before. There is no time to rest on our success. Success often leads to complacency, and complacency kills. What is your plan to take accountability to keep up with the pace of change?
5. In his book, *Change or Die: The Three Keys to Change at Work and in Life*, Alan Deutschman, cites that only one in nine people will make lifestyle changes (diet, exercise, etc.) after they

- are told they could prolong their life, restore their health, and even reverse diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease. Even when people know that these relatively simple changes can potentially save their lives, 90 percent choose to not take accountability to do so. Imagine the gargantuan task leaders face in order to create heightened levels of personal accountability for organizational objectives when only 10 percent of people will make simple changes to save their own lives.
6. Every job being performed by white-collar workers employed in any corporation is also being performed by someone on the outside that can be hired as a consultant to do the same work, probably with higher quality, and at a lower cost. How are you, or your team taking accountability to make sure you or your department survives in the new world of work?
 7. Whether individually, as a team, or organizationally if you cannot answer these three questions in a compelling manner, you are in trouble: What is the overt benefit I/we offer? What reasons can I/we point to as to why anyone should believe I/we are the best option? How am I, or are we, dramatically different from all other options?

The speaker paused, surveying his audience before driving home his final point: “Those who will survive and thrive in this new world of work are individuals, teams, and organizations who can maintain high levels of accountability, remain focused, and do whatever it takes to achieve what matters most.

“To take and lead accountability? If not you, who?”

Chapter 1

Taking Accountability

Positively the Best Decision

Frustration and exasperation were escalating among Janet's team. Their attempts to heighten accountability to boost organization performance and achieve better results had negligible impact. In fact, there was a noticeable decline in morale, enthusiasm, and engagement, with a touch of resentment and irritation to boot.

Fierce competition, shrinking margins, pressure to innovate, new government regulations, and a downturn in the economy had Squire Medical on its heels. Squire Medical was losing ground to the competition at an alarming rate.

Clayton offered, "It seems our plan to instill a stronger focus on personal accountability has had little to no affect on achieving more accountability. If anything, we have created stress, anxiety, acrimony, bitterness, and tension among the workforce."

The board of directors viewed Janet as an up-and-coming leadership superstar. They had seen her perform miracles in other roles over the previous two years and had confidence in her abilities to resurrect what was once an industry leader. Complacency, with a hint of arrogance, had thrust Squire Medical into a downward spiral. The competition was intense and the stakes were high. Employee morale and engagement were at an all-time low. Top talent was leaving in droves and those remaining had little hope of things getting better. There was a very real possibility that the plug may be pulled and assets sold off.

“I agree with Clayton. I have observed the same reactions,” Janet said. “We must create a culture that is engaged, focused, resilient, innovative, and agile.

“I believe I may have a solution to jump-start that journey. I had an epiphany last night while attending a Miracles for Kids meeting. Within our volunteer group it is commonplace that every member is passionate, engaged, committed, and energetic when asked to get involved with a project. Members leap at the opportunity to participate, take ownership, and accountability. Everyone involved voluntarily chooses to take personal accountability to achieve what matters most. There is an indestructible level of personal ownership among all involved, and nothing will deter the members from accomplishing the desired outcomes.

“Obstacles, challenges, and barriers are viewed as trivial and as minor bumps in the road on our way to attaining our goals. Excuse-making, finger-pointing, blame, and inaction simply do not exist. The group’s desire, focus, determination, and can-do mindset are unrivaled. With all of the external challenges we are faced with at this time, that same passion, zeal, and energy are paramount to our future success here.”

Not quite sure what Janet meant, Clayton asked for clarification.

“What I discovered,” Janet shared, “is that too often accountability is something that is addressed after the fact. Most often after a mistake is made, when somebody drops the ball or when someone screws up. So naturally in those circumstances, accountability is viewed as punitive, historic, focused on blame, and unpleasant. Far too many people hold a negative connotation or perception of accountability because of their past experiences.

“Think about it, when do you typically hear the question being asked, ‘Who is accountable?’”

Andrew, dripping with indignation, chimed in, “Usually after somebody makes a mistake.”

“Exactly! So, what are people really hearing when that question is asked?”

“Who messed up and who is to blame!” Andrew stated with a tone of disdain.

“And when they are really hearing ‘who is to blame,’ what do people tend to come up with?”

“A litany of excuses, stories, and reasons,” Andrew declared. “People spend more time explaining why something is not their fault than they do on finding a solution.”

“And time spent playing the blame-game is not helping anyone,” added Janet. “And as we hear more excuses being offered, as leaders we often are mistakenly compelled to ask the question ‘who is accountable’ even more. Not realizing that we are reinforcing the prevailing perception many hold of accountability being a negative experience. The more we ask the question after the fact, the more we fortify that belief. It can become a hairy monster that cannot be stopped.

“I cringe when I hear someone say the words, ‘We need to *make* them accountable.’ It even sounds like a punishment. We need to flip this and create positive experiences with accountability.

“How much more effective would we be as an organization if every employee voluntarily chose to *take* accountability rather than being pressured to *be* accountable? We need to engage employees on the front end—before the results are in. Think about it, when accountability is positioned up front, people have the opportunity to get excited about the ability to help while there is still time to influence the outcome.

“Our folks want to succeed in the workplace. They want to make a difference, find meaning in their work, and contribute. For the most part, people are not stupid, lazy, or defiant. People crave to find significance in their work and to feel they are part of a team doing something worthwhile. We have plenty of talented, smart people here at Squire. We need to engage and energize them to take accountability on the front end as we define and declare our desired results. Asking ‘Who is accountable?’ once the result is in does not change the result. Leadership is about getting our folks to voluntarily choose to take accountability while they can still help shape the outcome.

“With this approach we will begin to create positive, engaging, and forward-looking experiences around accountability, which I believe will result in employees exhibiting accountable behaviors.”

Janet challenged her team to create positive experiences around accountability by engaging employees on the front end. Instead of the after-the-fact experience of “Who is accountable for failing to achieve the result?” the question became “Who is accountable to

achieve the desired results?” The second format captivates people because they have the ability to choose the appropriate actions that will positively influence and move the team closer toward the desired result. Positioning accountability before the results are in promotes a heightened sense of control, which in turn leads to increased productivity and when people feel they have control and are productive it bolsters self-esteem, morale, and engagement.

This new focus on enlisting employees and creating ownership, energy, and passion preceding a clearly defined “must-achieve desired result” had an immediate and noticeable impact. Janet’s team observed a distinct shift in employee enthusiasm and willingness to voluntarily take personal accountability to achieve desired results. Accountability began to be viewed as something that was positive, forward-looking, and energizing.

Engaging, aligning, and enlisting employees up front requires leadership traits that reside inside all of us. Exemplary leaders foster high levels of personal accountability in a variety of ways on which we will elaborate throughout this book.

The cornerstone, and most essential element, to cultivating soaring levels of personal and organizational accountability is communicating top priority desired outcomes so that they are unquestionably clear in the minds of every employee. As we will reveal in later chapters, explicit and precise clarity on desired results or expectations is not as common as many believe, and the implications are severe.

A very close second element is connecting to both the head and the heart of those involved. Individuals must not only understand the logic behind the desired result, they must also recognize how it will benefit them. How will it make their job better or easier? How will it help their team? The organization? Their career? Their family? How will it make their life better or develop them? What is it that will light the fire within and get them to voluntarily choose to engage? What is in it for them? Deprived of compelling answers to these questions, many employees select compliance instead of commitment. To thrive and excel in the new world of work demands leadership create waves of enthusiasm and commitment. Obedience and compliance are ingredients commonly found in failure.

Janet discovered that when leadership changes the way accountability is experienced that employees welcome and embrace the

opportunity to contribute fully. She understood that nobody relishes being told, “I am holding you accountable,” “I am going to *make* you accountable,” “You need to be accountable,” or being asked “Who is accountable for this?”

The leadership team at Squire Medical attributed the shift in perception around accountability as a key component of revitalizing their culture. As they described it, they transitioned from a “have-to” to a “want-to” culture. What the team had described as a complacent, slow-moving, apathetic culture had transformed into one dubbed as agile, focused, innovative, and opportunistic. This change ultimately allowed Squire Medical not only to strengthen their competitive position in the market, but also to once again become the recognized leader.

Take Accountability or Blame? The Stakes Are High

Lack of accountability can lead to dire consequences. Consider the following scenario that played out in the Pacific Northwest back in 1993.

In what many described as the most infamous food-poisoning outbreak in history at the time, 732 people became seriously ill. Four children died and 178 others were left with severe injuries, including kidney and brain damage. Panic set in throughout the Pacific Northwest. Investigators quickly discovered that people had become stricken with the *E. coli* virus after consuming food from Jack in the Box.

As the story was reported, Jack in the Box chose to ignore Washington state laws stating to cook hamburgers to a temperature of 155 degrees to completely kill *E. coli*, and instead adhered to a standard of 140 degrees.

The company’s almost unforgivable response was, “No comment.” That soon led to Jack in the Box blaming their meat supplier, Vons Companies, Inc. Vons, evidently, was in no mood to take that sitting down and in a variety of ways pointed the finger of blame at the meat inspectors.

The meat inspectors were all too willing to play the blame-game and some declared that it was the fault of the USDA due to their inadequate number of inspectors. In testimony, some went as far as to blame Congress for not providing sufficient budgets.

team, she developed into what her CEO called a model leader that he encouraged others to emulate.

Do They Know the Rules of the Game?

There is a considerable difference in the degree of engagement, commitment, passion, and personal accountability possessed by employees coming to work every day playing to win, versus those playing not to lose. This is not a subtle issue. Are your employees coming to work every day trying to keep their heads above water, or are they focused on what they can do to further the cause and help the organization move closer to what matters most? Lack of clarity breeds the mindset of playing not to lose and brings about inaction, confusion, misunderstandings, lack of alignment, anxiety, frustration, and ultimately resignation to a “just doing my job” mindset that smothers peak performance and accountability in any organization.

Deprived of the “rules of the game” and immaculate understanding of what matters most (must-achieve desired results), the tsunami of the “day-job” mentality takes over and employees can easily allow themselves to be sucked into the trap of busywork.

The leadership team at CVP International embraced this idea and used it to develop a culture with unsurpassed levels of accountability, ownership, collaboration, and engagement.

Debby, the senior vice president of human resources at CVP International, invited me to meet with the company’s senior team of nine. CVP International partners with local and international organizations to promote social and economic change throughout the world. A highly successful firm over the years, they were looking to become even more effective. Debby shared with me that Robert, her CEO, held the topic of accountability near and dear to his heart. Her belief was that Robert would embrace the opportunity to create even higher levels of accountability among all employees.

The firm was considering several options to further develop their personnel in order to leap to the next level of performance. We were offered a window of four hours to meet with the senior leadership team, share a bit about our work, and present the case for enhancing levels of personal accountability as the most viable and beneficial option. Debby coached me in advance, sharing that these

team members would be skeptical. They had already been pitched by several other firms, and were growing weary of the dog and pony shows. Debby confided that she had had to do a lot of “internal selling” simply to get this team to submit to yet another consultant’s presentation. We were warned that some might choose not to show up.

Prior to our meeting with the team, Debby was able to secure a thirty-minute telephone conversation for us to speak with Robert in order to gain a sense of what was most important to him and what he believed would propel them to the next tier of greatness.

During that conversation, we asked Robert what were the top two or three most important things his organization must achieve over the next twelve to eighteen months. This is not a simple question to answer for any CEO. There is so much that must be done in organizations, and to narrow it down to only two or three top priorities is incredibly difficult. Robert spent the next twenty-five minutes whittling down a list of eighteen important goals down to what he believed were the three “must-achieve no matter what” desired results.

With only a minute left in our telephone appointment, we asked one final question to Robert, “What percentage of your employees know that these are the three most important results that must be achieved?” Without hesitation, Robert confidently responded, “At least 90 percent.”

We thanked Robert for his time and told him we looked forward to meeting personally the following week.

Debby escorted us into the boardroom thirty minutes before the meeting. While we were setting up, Karen strolled in and, without introducing herself, grumbled, “How long is this going to take?”

As the next five members of the leadership team arrived, I noticed their excitement about spending four hours with me mirrored, or was substantially less, than Karen’s.

Jim arrived and stated that Derek and Ken chose not to attend as their mornings had filled up and they did not have time for this. Robert was the final member to arrive. He had just finished a call with a colleague in Nigeria, and it was obvious from his demeanor that there was an issue weighing on his mind. Based on what appeared to be a common sentiment in the room—not much interest in being there—we decided to alter the planned approach.

Instead of starting with the standard introductions and niceties, along with a quick overview of our work and sharing our understanding of what they were hoping to achieve with whatever firm they chose to partner, we opted for another tactic.

“Before we start, would you open up the materials we developed for you to page six? We know your time is valuable and you all have a lot on your plate. So, let’s jump right into this.

“You will see that page six is a blank lined page. Without discussing with your colleagues, write down on that page the answer to the following question, ‘If you were sitting in Robert’s office and asked him what the top three must-achieve desired results this organization must absolutely realize over the next twelve to eighteen months, how would Robert respond?’”

The facial expressions of the team were priceless. We could only imagine what they were thinking. Seven perplexed faces looked at us and then at each other, wondering what in the world they were doing here.

“Go ahead. Write them down exactly as you believe Robert would respond. We will give you five minutes to think about it.”

Robert glanced at us with what seemed to be calm assurance. You will recall that he confidently claimed to us during our telephone discussion a few days earlier that at least 90 percent of all employees, not just his senior leadership team, would be able to answer that question exactly the way he did.

As the other members sat in silent contemplation for two, three, then four minutes without writing anything in the materials, Robert’s optimism turned to concern bordering on dismay.

“One more minute to finish your list, team. If you cannot come up with three, write down at least one,” we told the group.

“Now that you have your list compiled, we have two more requests for you team. Next to each result that you recorded, please write down two numbers for us. First, what percentage of your sixty-seven hundred employees would answer the question exactly the way you did? We will give you one minute to write down that percentage.

“Secondly, how are you measuring the result? In other words, what is the metric you are using? For example, if you wrote down that we must achieve optimal customer satisfaction, how are you

measuring that? What is the metric, or result, that you must achieve, and where does the organization stand against that metric today?

“Okay, so let me capture these on the whiteboard. Karen, share with me just one that you recorded on page six.”

“Well, I am not sure this is right, but I wrote down ‘employee satisfaction.’”

“Great. How many of you in the room, by show of hands, wrote down ‘employee satisfaction?’”

Two hands went up, and Robert’s was not one of them.

“So, Karen, what percentage of your sixty-seven hundred employees would have responded exactly as you did?”

Shyly and almost inaudibly, Karen said, “I wrote down 95 percent.”

“Okay, great. So let me note that on the whiteboard.

Attempting to be humorous, we suggested to Karen, “So two out of seven members of your senior team had that as a must-achieve desired result, but you believe 95 percent of all employees would have stated that result?”

“And finally, Karen, what is the metric you are using to measure that result?”

Karen whispered, “I did not get that far. I am not sure how we measure that.”

“No problem at all. Karen. Let’s move on to another one. Jim, share just one that you have on your list.”

Reluctantly, Jim offered, “Healthy EBITDA.”

“Perfect. So how many of you in the room had EBITDA on page six?”

One other hand went up. Yes, of course, it was the chief financial officer.

“Okay Jim, what percentage of your sixty-seven hundred employees would have answered exactly the way you did?”

“Well, I had written down half, but based upon what I am seeing here, I want to adjust that now.”

“For now, let’s use what you have. What is the EBITDA metric that must be achieved?”

“We need to be at 12.7 or better.”

“And Jim, how many employees would know that number, or for that matter, would know what EBITDA is and how they contribute toward improving that metric?”

Humbly, Jim responded with, “Few to none.”

This exercise went on for another ten minutes. As the list of top three desired results swelled to nineteen, we could see that Robert had a moment of self-discovery. He allowed the conversation to go on for another five minutes and then asked if he could speak with his team.

As we have discussed to this point, clearly defined desired results are foundational to cultivating high levels of accountability. See figure 1.1 for common consequences when this principle is absent, and for a partial list of some of root causes.

“This has been eye opening for me. I need to take ownership for our lack of alignment around what is most important. I assumed you all knew. I failed you. I was certain that all of you would answer Mike’s question with the same three results I identified with him on the telephone last week. I was wrong. If I did not stop this exercise that list may have ballooned to thirty or more. I would like Mike

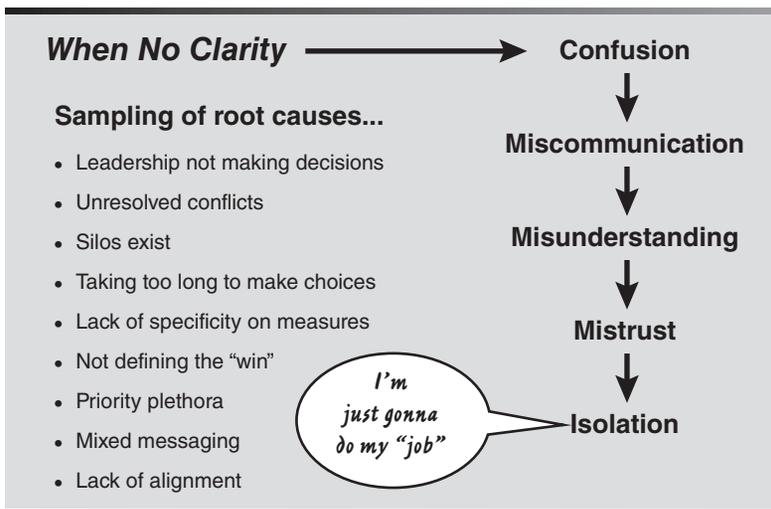


FIGURE 1.1 Lack of Clarity: Consequences and Sampling of Root Causes

to help us come to agreement on and help us create clarity and alignment around the top three must-achieve desired results for this firm. Then we must do what is necessary to make sure all sixty-seven hundred of our employees know those results are what we want them to take accountability to help us achieve. Everything they do should contribute to assuring we achieve those results.”

All seven members enthusiastically agreed.

Sandra asked, “I see the value in everyone knowing the most crucial desired results, but I am not sure I get the whole ‘metric’ thing. Why is developing a metric for each one so important? Is not just knowing what is important effective enough?”

“A very valid question, Sandra,” I replied. “And the reason is rather simple. If employees do not know how we are measuring success, and where we stand today in relation to our desired state, how can they possibly show up daily and make a conscious decision about what they can do each day to take accountability to help move the needle in the right direction? It would be like opening up a board game with hundreds of pieces, but no directions detailing how to play and, more important, how to win. If I do not know how to win, how can I possibly make a purposeful decision about what action I can take to do so?”

“Another bonus is that employees are at their best, and most engaged in their work, when they believe they are playing a winnable game. The highest standard to which a leader can aspire is if they are creating a winnable game for those they lead. To do so, everyone must know how we are keeping score and what the score is today.

“Suppose this huge whiteboard in the front of this room was instead a window and that we were five floors up looking over a playground basketball court. Close your eyes and create this picture in your mind. On that basketball court are a bunch of kids in the middle of a game. Assume we cannot see any scoreboard, but we know they are keeping score based on the behaviors they’re displaying. Tell me what you are seeing that suggests you know they are keeping score?”

The group in the room rapidly began to shout out responses.

- ◆ “They are high-fiving each other after a basket.”
- ◆ “I see them supporting and encouraging each other.”
- ◆ “They are playing hard, hustling, and giving it their all.”

- ◆ “They are cheering for one another.”
- ◆ “They are engaged and focused.”
- ◆ “They are talking to each other and giving advice and feedback.”
- ◆ “Everyone is contributing. Even the subs on the bench are involved and energized.”

“That was a simple exercise demonstrating how the power of keeping score ignites a variety of beneficial behaviors. Are those the types of behaviors you believe would contribute to creating a culture of accountability within CVP International?”

The message was received loud and clear.

After six months of concerted effort by Robert and his entire team to adopt and implement this key accountability principle among others, Robert called us with an update. He reported that the board of directors commended him and his team for leading the organization into heights of performance they never believed would be realized. Furthermore, they confided that they sensed a positive difference in the attitude and demeanor of the culture.

Robert went on to share a story about his recently hired new chief of party in Nigeria. After being on board for less than a week, Dikembe knocked on Robert’s door and, unsolicited, offered his plan to help the firm achieve the three must-achieve desired results that the team identified several weeks earlier.

“Evidently,” Robert exclaimed, “the constant discussion about these three results among all employees within the organization and the fact all meetings begin with a thirty-second reminder of how that meeting will help move us closer to one of the results was eye opening for him. Dikembe divulged that the abundance of visual reminders and employee passion inspired him to proactively seek me out to pledge his alignment and dedication to doing whatever it takes to make sure we achieve them all.”

Creating a winnable game for your team or your employees is compulsory to cultivating a highly accountable organization. Employees at every level must be keenly aware of the rules of the game: the desired results; how each of those results is being measured; and where the team or organization stands today in relation to the desired metric (what must be achieved).

His point was that too many people live their lives convinced they are trapped and have no control over their destiny. The reality is you have complete and total control over your destiny.

Likewise, the choice as to how you view your realities or situation is entirely yours. Will you, your team, or your organization choose to concentrate and place emphasis on all of the reasons why you are not making the progress you want to make? Or instead, will you zero in on solutions, opportunities, and possibilities to achieve what matters most? The parable of the two shoe salesman assigned to a remote region in the middle of a third world country is apropos. Once settled into their new locations they report back to their boss with an update:

Salesman One: “The situation is hopeless. Nobody here wears shoes.”

Salesman Two: “The opportunity is unlimited. Nobody here wears shoes.”

The next time you find yourself falling into the trap of playing the blame-game, think about Tito, or someone you may know like him, who has faced significant challenges and chose to maintain a mindset of “what can I do to achieve the results I want?”

Stay the Course—Avoid Drowning “Below the Water”

“We didn’t do anything wrong, but somehow we lost.”

The CEO of what was once the world’s leading mobile phone manufacturer made that statement on November 13, 2015. Read it again and let it sink into the depths and every crevice of your brain.

That statement is perhaps the epitome of the blame-game. It includes absolutely no ownership of why they ended up in their calamitous situation, and no hint of a plan to find a solution.

When I read that statement my mind flashed back to my good friend Captain Hartman.

Captain Hartman described to me a concept his team in the navy called “Below the Water” behavior. This was the term they used to

describe civilian and enlisted personnel who would fall into the trap of excuse-making, finger-pointing, or any other destructive facet of the blame-game.

“You surely have dealt with these types of folks, Mike. They exist in every organization,” the Captain said with disgust. “They can wreak havoc on a team and devastate a culture. We have no tolerance for their behavior.

“Individuals with a ‘Below the Water’ mindset are always full of excuses and cling to the futile notion that nothing is ever their fault. Worse yet, they are often insistent there is nothing they can do about the situation. They wallow in self-pity and blame their problems on other people, events, or things. They live their lives snugly nestled in a cauldron of blame and denial.”

Captain Hartman challenged me to think about the last time one of my colleagues, friends, or even family members approached me with an endless list of excuses and reasons as to why they could not achieve an assignment, complete a project, follow through on a commitment, or finish a chore.

Several familiar faces immediately flashed to mind. Some very quickly.

He then asked, “How does it feel when someone always offers excuses why everything is not their fault and consistently complains about their challenges, their boss, company policies, their job?”

He saw by the look on my face that he did not need to wait for an answer. That sort of behavior is exasperating. That behavior, left unaddressed, will spread like wildfire within a team and throughout an organization. It will drag a team down and immobilize an organization.

“Now,” he suggested, “think of a time when one of your colleagues took ownership and accountability and said, ‘Listen, I know I did not deliver on what was expected. I take ownership for dropping the ball, and here is my plan to make sure it never happens again.’”

“That has a completely different feel. That is the mindset supervisors, managers, and leaders around here notice in our people. That’s the culture we want.

“People around here know that excuses are not tolerated. No matter how compelling and ingenious the excuses may be, we do

not accept them. It is clear that around here we learn from mistakes and accidents. Mistakes, oversights, and accidents happen. We are all human. We do not dwell on reasons why, or excuses, nor do we seek to punish, admonish, and call out who was to blame. Instead we take pause, consider the current realities, and turn our attention to finding solutions to move forward. Achieving what matters most is always foremost on our minds.

“Our folks know that when faced with difficult circumstances, challenges, and hurdles, we expect them to search out solutions and not to look to point the finger of blame.

“That blame-game and excuse-making mindset is contagious. But so is the ‘let’s find a solution’ mindset. So we focus there to nourish that behavior so that it becomes inculcated into our culture.

“It takes self-awareness, and sometimes a kick in the ass, to realize when you are drowning ‘Below the Water.’ But once people realize they are floundering in the blame-game, they quickly recognize their realities and understand they must take ownership and accountability to figure out how to move forward and make progress toward helping the team to deliver on our objectives.

“We devote a lot of time and energy to creating and sustaining our culture. Bringing attention and awareness to desired behaviors is one of the most important parts of maintaining our desired culture. You would expect high levels of accountability in the military, and we have that for the most part. However, even the majority of our enormous civilian population personnel possess a ‘whatever it takes’ mentality. That is a result of the importance and focused attention we place on developing our optimal culture.

“You know what I learned, Mike? Perseverance comes from the same part of the brain as decision making and emotion. So to instill that tenacity and determination I push my folks to figure things out on their own, even when it may be easier or quicker for me to solve problems for them.

“I have found that when I am able to spark both the decision-making and emotional parts of the brain that perseverance, determination, and resolve flourish.

“You will find that leadership here is intentional about the words we choose and the experiences we create for our people. Words create pictures. Pictures stimulate emotions. Emotions fuel

beliefs. Beliefs drive actions. And most important, actions produce results.”

Just then, there was a knock at the door. “Come on in,” Captain Hartman shouted. Vinnie, one of the project owners from the civilian workforce, entered the room. Without any pleasantries or chitchat, Vinnie immediately launched into a tirade. With veins popping out of his neck and blood coursing into his beet-red face, he rattled off a laundry list of all the problems, obstructions, impediments, policies, and people that were making his team’s job impossible. I felt uncomfortable and awkward as I sat there and observed.

Vinnie was relentless. I turned my attention to the Captain. He appeared calm, reserved, and emotionless, yet he was genuinely listening.

Finally, Vinnie had run out of complaints. Captain Hartman calmly asked Vinnie, “Is there anything else that is holding you back?”

Vinnie, appearing a bit puzzled, thought for a few seconds and then said, “No, that’s all of it.”

“So, of all that you just shared with me, and correct me if I am wrong, there are seven or eight issues that are out of your control and it sounded like there are two or three that you can control. Is that about right?”

“Yes sir, that sounds about right,” Vinnie admitted.

“Vinnie, you know as well as I do how important this project is and what is on the line here. There are lives at stake. We have people depending on us. What is the one thing you can do now to make progress toward the results we must achieve?”

At that point I could see Vinnie’s disposition and countenance change. The Captain had skillfully helped Vinnie focus on what he could control instead of what he could not.

In a matter of seconds Vinnie began to rattle off several ideas of how his team could move through the perceived barriers and make progress to ensure the project was not delayed.

Once Vinnie left, Captain Hartman shared, “When Vinnie walked in here, he was ‘Below the Water.’ He was stuck and frozen in what you like to call the blame-game. I have learned over time that to get people to take accountability, ownership, and move forward, it is best to let them draw their own conclusion to do so. Asking open-ended questions is one of the tactics I have found to be most successful.”

“Without whopping levels of organizational ownership, the best we will achieve is mediocrity. Think about it. If our employees lack ownership for our circumstances, if they simply do no care or are indifferent, it only follows that they will not take appropriate and necessary actions to improve them.”

I was impressed with Jim’s visible passion about the topic. I later learned how he applied these very concepts to his own life to achieve some incredible goals.

“Once you identify and own your circumstances, the only way forward is to find a solution,” Jim explained. “I have seen far too many teams and people waste enormous amounts of time discussing what went wrong, who was to blame, and all the reasons they believe prevent them from achieving success. I say, learn from your mistakes, and then quickly move on and figure out a plan forward.

“Effective and accountable people view complications, challenges, and impediments as minor bumps in the road on the way to success. Think about any world-class athlete or anyone with a singular focus on a goal they truly own. They maintain a solution-focused mindset. They refuse to participate in the blame-game. Creating solutions and a plan to move forward is the third category.

With near contempt, Jim continued, “I read recently that 92 percent of people that purchase a gym membership and 88 percent of people that own exercise equipment do not use them. Imagine that. These people have recognized their realities, accepted ownership of their situation, and went as far as figuring out a solution. But a solution is useless if you do not implement it.

“Taking action and following through with your solution is the final category. Relentless follow-through on commitments must become the norm around here. It must be commonplace for leaders to model the desired behaviors they expect from their teams. Employees must do what they say they will do.

“We must commit to highly visible ongoing alignment, engagement, and support. I believe trust, collaboration, and commitment will snowball when individuals and teams create accountable experiences for one another.

“The order is paramount,” Jim explained. “If an individual, team or organization does not recognize their realities, they cannot possibly

choose to accept ownership and take accountability to change a reality they ignore, refuse, or have not acknowledged.

“And to recognize their realities and voluntarily accept ownership is pointless without creating a solution or remedy.

“Assume they do take complete ownership for their situation and commit to improving it. Generating and creating solutions without putting those plans into action, well, is just insane.”

Jim’s elegant, simple, and eloquently described template made perfect sense to the team.

As Jim walked the team through his four categories, I thought back to a day earlier that week. A colleague of mine had e-mailed me a picture that captured the essence of what Jim explained to me. I hope some day to use the picture with a leadership team that is stuck in the trap of viewing their world through rose-tinted glasses.

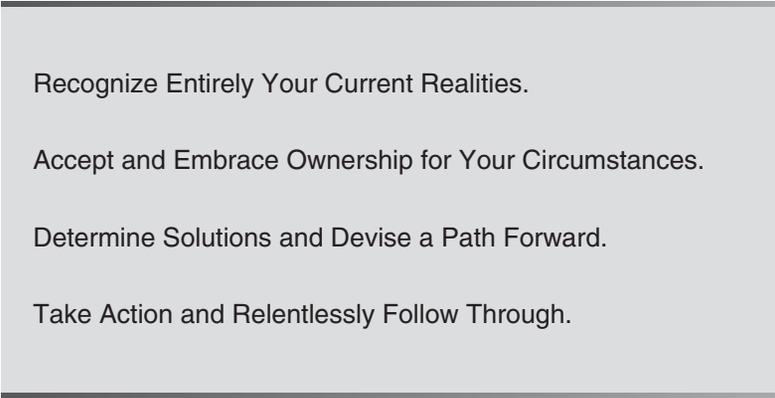
Envision a middle-aged portly, balding man of generous proportions, wearing a tiny bathing suit and standing in front of a very large full-length mirror. This man could very well have played NFL nose tackle at one time, and “let himself go” for fifteen years since retiring from the league. Rather than staying fit and healthy, he appears to have spent the past fifteen years attempting to set a world record for eating.

As he looks at himself in the mirror, he is admiring what the reflection shows of a very handsome, physically fit man that some might describe as “Chippendales-like.”

The point being, if this man were told to “get in shape” or “lose some weight,” his response would be, “Why?” In his eyes, he is the picture of fitness and health. Think about that the next time you ask your team members to change, or take ownership to achieve a result they believe is not necessary. If they believe (their reality or perception) that things as they exist today are perfectly acceptable, why would they choose to change or to take ownership to alter a reality they believe is wonderful?

Recognizing your realities truly is foundational to fostering heightened levels of personal and organizational accountability.

“Before we adjourn this meeting,” said Jim, “I am asking each of us to commit to find ways to consistently demonstrate these behaviors. We must be the models.”



Recognize Entirely Your Current Realities.

Accept and Embrace Ownership for Your Circumstances.

Determine Solutions and Devise a Path Forward.

Take Action and Relentlessly Follow Through.

FIGURE 3.1 Mountainview Enterprise's 4 Categories of Accountability

The four categories of accountability the team at Mountainview Enterprise's identified and adopted are depicted in figure 3.1. As Jim and his colleagues discovered, creating a common language and understanding of what accountability is, was foundational in their efforts to establish a culture where accountability was embraced, internalized, and demonstrated.

Among the commitments made by the group: more precise, open, and aligned communication; unwavering focus on solutions versus problems; focusing on top priorities; rewarding effort and admonishing inactivity; genuine openness to new ideas and thinking; asking for opinions and insights from others; staying engaged rather than dwelling on blame; and to grow and learn from failures rather than punishing and stifling positive intent.

Through a coordinated effort devised by the leadership group, their definition of accountability was instilled within every employee and team throughout Mountainview Enterprises.

With a common precise understanding of what accountability looked like, as well as what was expected, the senior leadership team detected a noticeable swell in the behaviors they had identified. To the surprise of nobody, within a period of only six months the key metrics related to organizational performance and effectiveness climbed comparably.

Chapter 4

Accountability Transcends

Powerful Shift in Perception

Ask a random sampling of ten or more reports, peers, individual contributors, supervisors, managers, directors, and senior leaders, “What is your job?” and listen closely to their replies.

How many of the responses centered predominantly on your “must-achieve desired results”? What percentage of the answers chiefly zoomed in on a list of activities and duties you often will find included in a job description?

Teams and organizations derive considerable benefits when employees at all levels view and approach their work with a staunch focus on must-achieve desired results rather than activity, duties, and roles.

Think back to a time in your professional career when you were at your “personal best” and most engaged in your work.

For most of us, those personal bests were during times when we were part of a team, on a mission to achieve something special, and believed we were playing a game we could win. It is during those moments that individuals voluntarily choose to take accountability and to go above and beyond what is “required” to help the team achieve what matters most.

A focus on top desired results ingrains that shift in thinking and provokes beneficial changes in the way employees go about their work. Once grounded in a focus on what matters most and feeling that they are part of something bigger, meaningful, and important, employees are more aware and conscious of how their work has an impact on other people and teams.

With an organization-wide mindset of “the must-achieve desired results are my job,” alignment around what matters most is never an issue. With this subtle mindset embraced, collaboration swells, teamwork is strengthened, determination intensifies, camaraderie blooms, creativity and innovation flourish, and employee engagement and morale rocket.

Just as every single player on a football team is focused on doing whatever it takes to help the team win, every employee on your team must embrace that same notion. Getting there requires focused leadership, as Craig the CEO of Harvest Financial discovered.

“So, my job is to make sure everyone in the organization is aligned and clear on those results,” Craig said out loud while approaching me as his team was dispersing.

As the CEO of a mid-sized bank with \$15.3 billion in assets, Craig was under extreme pressure from the board of directors to capture additional market share and stave off competition.

Craig’s leadership team of nine, coupled with twelve additional colleagues identified as rising stars, had just spent ten intense hours working together to identify, define, and determine precise metrics of the top four goals for the upcoming fiscal year.

The day included plenty of passion, debate, conviction, disagreement, contention, and perhaps a touch of exasperation. But in the end these twenty-two individuals coalesced around a set of four critically important outcomes they believed must be accomplished.

Every member declared their alignment, ownership, and personal accountability to ensure that those results would be realized. They agreed that with these four results achieved the firm would be positioned for ongoing success in the future.

Craig continued toward me, smiling with a sense of pride and satisfaction. I smiled back at Craig and asserted, “No, Craig. That is not your job.”

He looked at me, puzzled. I continued, “Achieving those four results is your job. Just like every other employee of this bank.”

I asked Craig, “At the end of the year is your board of directors going to ask you if you communicated your top desired results to your employees, or are they going to want to know if you achieved them? And if you do not achieve them, whose tail is on the line?”

What Craig instantly embraced and internalized at that moment is vitally important. The desired results are everyone's job.

"What we are looking for, Craig, is to forge an organization-wide mindset among every single person that achieving those four results is their job."

I asked Craig, "Did you ever hear the story about the janitor at NASA?"

"No, not that I can recall."

"Well, I am not sure if the version I have heard dozens of times is accurate, but let me share the crux of the story.

"When John Kennedy made the declaration back in the 1960s that we would put a man on the moon and bring him back safely to earth by the end of the decade, NASA was under the gun. JFK identified a must-achieve desired result that became the job of every single person associated with NASA.

"During a visit to NASA, Kennedy was touring a facility and surrounded by NASA personnel. One of the individuals standing near him was a member of the building maintenance staff.

"Kennedy turned to him and asked, 'What is your job here, young man?'

"Without skipping a beat, the kid's response was, 'I am here to help put a man on the moon.'

"This kid, a janitor at the facility, viewed his job as helping to put a man on the moon.

"Imagine the impact to an organization when every single member views their job as making certain that the absolute most important results are realized?"

Craig could not have been more inaccurate by believing that simply identifying and *communicating* the must-achieve desired results was his job. After all, he was the leader. Leaders are paid to achieve desired results. Not to communicate them.

With his initial thinking in place that his job was simply to communicate what must be achieved, the team of thousands of employees that Craig was leading at Harvest Financial could fail to achieve those results and he could still feel he did his job. That could not be further from the truth, and especially not acceptable for the CEO.

Cement the Focus

Have you ever had an overwhelmingly hectic and chaotic work week and, upon reflection when the weekend finally arrives, discovered you had accomplished little to nothing important?

It is easy to let the tsunami of “the work” sidetrack and derail us from focusing on what matters most. Top-performing individuals, teams, and organizations avoid being sucked into the trap of allowing the “urgent” to sabotage what is most important.

As a leader of a team or organization, given the choice, would you prefer to have your employees operate at peak productivity or optimal effectiveness?

Does being active and busy ensure success? Consider the following dialogue between two salespeople.

Salesman One proudly boasts to Salesman Two, “I had a lot of good conversations today.” Salesman Two responds, “Yeah, I did not make any sales either.”

If Salesman One believes the measure of success is staying active and busy, he had a marvelous day.

If he were to string together a series of several hundred identical days, would he without question be a significant, vital, and positive contributor to his employer’s success? Would his actions absolutely and totally ensure a triumphant career for him?

Salesman One was immensely productive, yet did not make a sale. If his performance was graded based on activity, he would have every right to go have a beer with his buddies and glowingly brag about what an amazing salesperson he is.

However, if his performance played out this way over time, his determined and vigorous focus on activity alone would not necessarily produce desired results for him or his employer.

I recall sitting in a workshop once when the facilitator of the session asked the group, “Does all activity produce results?” Nearly everyone in the room immediately and confidently replied, “No.”

The instructor stayed silent for a few seconds, smiled, and then slyly said, “You are all wrong. Even if you do nothing, you will achieve a result. It just will not be the result you want.”

His point was that a singular focus on being busy or staying active does not assure you, your team, or your organization that your desired results will be realized.

The only reason companies hire employees is that at some point someone in a managerial or leadership position makes a decision that if we hire these people and add them to the team it will help us achieve our desired outcomes.

Companies do not hire people to simply show up to be active and busy. Yet, oftentimes during and following the hiring process there is so much attention paid to job descriptions, roles, and duties that companies inadvertently and unintentionally create a focus on activity versus results.

In the highest-performing teams and organizations, employees focus on what they must achieve rather than what they must do. They pay attention to outcomes instead of tasks. They are cognizant of the difference between a means to an end and the end itself.

There are negative repercussions when a majority of team members or employees maintain and hold an intense focus on only their role or job.

When individuals and teams concentrate solely on their roles, it quickly leads to elements of the blame-game being played. On a team or in an environment like that you will often hear comments such as, "That is not my job," "They were supposed to do that," "I did not know that I was supposed to ...," "Nobody told me that," "I am waiting for them to ...," "I do not know how to ...," "I did not know that was important," "If they would just do what they are supposed to do"—and the epitome of the blame-game, "That is not my fault and there is nothing I can do about it."

Those elements of the blame-game foster dangerous, destructive, and toxic emotions of guilt, resentment, isolation, and mistrust. Such emotions often consciously and subconsciously lead to silos being forged, breakdowns in communication, hoarding of resources, unwillingness to share ideas, and separation.

There is enormous benefit derived when a simple and subtle mindset shift is adopted, embraced, and internalized. I speak of the mindset where every member of the team and every employee views and defines their job as helping the team accomplish the must-achieve desired results. That is the only reason we hire them, anyway.

Therefore, from the very first interview with a new candidate your top desired goals should be clearly explained and detailed. New hires

must learn from their first interaction with your team or organization what is most important—the must-achieve desired results.

Sure, they may be given a title and perhaps even a list of tasks they must execute, but they must understand that their job is not done until the team or organization collectively attains what matters most.

Leadership must spearhead the endeavor to create and instill that same mindset shift within current team members and employees. This effort cannot be delegated. The highest level of accountability can only be reached when every single employee is crystal clear on the must-achieve desired results, and defines and accepts their job as helping the team or organization secure them.

Robert, the CEO of CVP International, and his team that we mentioned in chapter 1, fully embraced this simple practice and attributes it as one of the key reasons alignment and ownership around their must-achieve desired results are unprecedented. Barriers, such as lack of collaboration, hoarding resources, poor communication, and the blame-game, that in the past had slowed optimal organizational effectiveness, are rarely experienced now. The CVP team uses their strategic plan and clearly defined desired results to indoctrinate new hires, and to create alignment, ownership, and accountability from day one.

In addition to the obvious benefits, there is a significant and compelling by-product resulting when this mindset is nurtured. Employees begin to find more meaning and purpose in their work. Levels of engagement, morale, loyalty, and creativity tend to escalate when employees recognize they are part of something bigger than themselves.

The following parable demonstrates this.

Two men carrying heavy stones down a dusty road are stopped by a stranger who asks, “What are you doing?”

The first man answers, “Can you not see? I am carrying stones.”

The second man answers, “I am helping to build a cathedral.”

Which of the two would you choose to be part of your team?

With this newly acquired mindset shift in place, silos begin to crumble, collaboration escalates, alignment intensifies, creativity soars, resiliency surges, camaraderie snowballs, boundaries fade, perseverance balloons, and trust blossoms.

When a team or organization embraces the notion that we are all in this together, it immediately eradicates the common blame-game favorites of, “It is not my job,” “I did not know,” and “I am confused.” When the most crucial desired results have been clearly defined, communicated, and positioned in a manner that they are everyone’s job, those blame-game elements become absurd to even consider.

Furthermore, with this new shift in thinking, we vanquish inactivity and waiting, and spawn a can-do or “what else can I do to help the team?” attitude. Searching for solutions to overcome complications, problems, and obstacles becomes the norm even when folks may be justified to play the blame-game.

Once this shift in thinking is in place, team members and employees at all levels recognize that they are accountable for more than what is on their job description.

In an organization like this, Salesman One, whom we met earlier, is no longer eager to boast about his busy day.

The Magical Mindset Shift

Magic happens when we are crystal clear that the must-achieve desired results are everyone’s job and forge the mindset that we are all in this together.

With new cafés opening weekly across the country, the leadership team of Café Delight held a shared sense of optimism about the future. Well, except for Audrey and Russell.

Audrey and Russell were puzzled why the performance of the organization’s more than eight hundred current stores had plateaued. The fresh innovations to format, tweaks to the menu, and additional staff training had produced unexciting and pedestrian results.

Both believed that simply to continue opening more stores would not be enough to secure and sustain a foothold in this ultra-competitive market. Their belief was that in addition to launching new locations, it was essential to boost performance and profits from the existing stores. It seemed everything they attempted fell short of expectations.

Russell thought aloud, “We’ve got to find a solution. Our margins are tight and competition is fierce. Sure, we have new stores opening and that is exciting, but my concern is that staying the

Chapter 5

The Preeminent Organization

Accountability Is the Catalyst

In the “new world of work,” ideas, talent, speed, and leadership capacity are what separate top-performing organizations, teams, and individuals from the laggards.

Driving transformational change and strategies that require shifts in human behavior may be the most difficult challenges a leader can face. What do top leaders do to gain voluntary contributions of discretionary performance from those they lead? How do they create alignment, engagement, ownership, and accountability for desired results at every level of an organization? How do they ensure that key strategies are not slowly suffocated but instead supported to produce exponential results?

We have touched on these questions in earlier chapters. We provide more ideas to consider in this chapter.

Lasting change and flawless execution of key strategies to achieve what matters most require voluntary participation from a diverse and large number of personnel. Clarity, transparency, inclusion, alignment, collaboration, empowerment, and trust are essential. When these critical elements are in place, employees will naturally become motivated, passionate, resolute, and accountable to achieve what matters most.

The mission of forging a highly accountable culture must begin with leaders creating a sparkingly lucid and scintillating picture of the exhilarating opportunities and intoxicating possibilities that exist—the “must-achieve desired results.” Leaders must take ferocious ownership to ensure that every employee is able to envision how that new future positively affects them.

How will it make their job better or easier? How does it help them? How will it benefit their team? How, in any way, does it make their personal life better? A “want-to” culture trumps a “have-to” culture.

Team members must be able to make the connection between “what they do” and how that contributes to their organization’s or team’s ability to successfully realize the desired outcomes. With that translation established, the desired results begin to manifest in the manner employees go about performing their work.

Those foundational steps—(1) clearly defining and communicating the must-achieve desired results, (2) inculcating the “what’s in it for me?” to everyone involved, and (3) revealing the translation—are paramount to cultivating a culture with soaring levels of accountability. When these steps are engineered poorly, mediocrity wins the day. When they are executed flawlessly, accountability and peak performance flourish.

A highly accountable culture is always a top-performing culture. With deliberate and intentional focus you can shape your optimal culture.

Your culture—the way your folks think and act—is your “brand.” The way your organization or team is perceived is a direct result of the experiences your employees and team members create for your clients and customers (internal and external).

Employees and team members think and act the way they do primarily for one reason. That reason is the manner in which they are being led. For the most part, the actions and behaviors that team members and employees choose to exhibit is a reflection of the culture that has been established, fostered, nurtured, perpetuated, and, at times, tolerated by leadership.

An organization’s culture is either an engine propelling it toward its most crucial desired results, or an anchor impeding progress and slowing performance.

Corporate culture is the convergence of the cumulative way your employees think and act, and the beliefs they hold that drive the actions they choose. Every organization and every team has a default culture. That culture is producing the results you are achieving now—whether exceptional or poor.

As a leader, you can let your culture lead you, or you can define and shape your optimal culture. This applies to those leading teams

of five to ten people as much as it applies to those leading thousands. Through conscious focus, you can ignite extraordinary performance from your team or organization by shaping your optimal culture.

An important question to answer as you begin is, “If the results you must achieve in the future are loftier, more challenging, or just different from those you are achieving today, can you expect to attain them if your culture continues to think, act, and behave the way it always has?”

What is the tongue-in-cheek definition of insanity?

Doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result.

Accountability is the catalyst to creating your optimal culture. A culture where employees and team members voluntarily choose to think, act, and behave in a manner that will armor your organization or team with a competitive advantage in the new world of work. An accountable culture is the most effective culture.

Leaders must own the process of developing and shaping their optimal culture. For some, it may feel awkward, or perhaps they may believe it is something that should be handed off to human resources. After all, many leaders have been educated, developed, and have spent most of their careers on the strategic side of running organizations. The “people stuff” is most often not their forte.

No matter the multitude of business savvy and skilled human resources professionals you may have on staff, delegating culture shaping is always the death knell to lasting culture change.

Human resources, along with every other department, should be involved. But the senior leadership team must possess the same degree of ownership, rigor, and passion around creating the optimal organizational culture that it holds for devising and launching the most important strategic initiatives. After all, culture trumps strategy every time.

As a leader, you are being thoroughly scrutinized at all times. Your team members and employees are watching you very closely. They observe every signal you send through your body language, the tone of your voice, and, most important, the congruency between what you say and what you do.

The quickest way to derail something as crucial as shaping your optimal culture is to choose not be involved. Think about the message

that sends to those around you. Leaders must be involved and highly visible throughout the process.

A second and equally powerful culture-shaping saboteur is to behave in a manner that does not mirror the message. Employees will tolerate what you say; they will act on what they see you do. Leaders must be sentient and keenly aware of the experiences they are creating for those they lead. Those experiences will either reinforce the beliefs your employees already hold, or create new beliefs. When leaders are cognizant of this, they are more likely to create experiences that develop beliefs that will stimulate the desired actions they wish to see from employees. One slip-up—yes, just one—can throw a culture-shaping effort into a state of unrecoverable disarray.

Shaping an Accountable Culture

Through her observations and analysis over time, Alex captured the essence of an exemplary leader and packaged it in a concise, useful manner that was easily understood and practical.

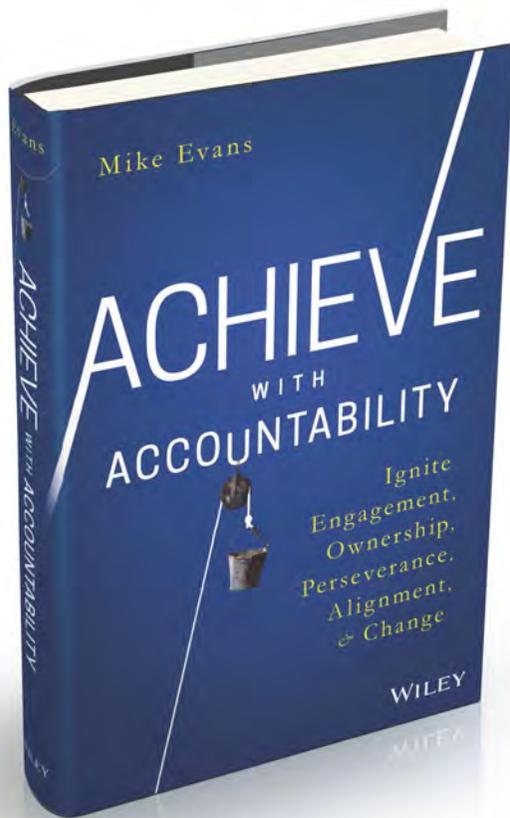
Many of the managers and leaders with whom I spent time at Gencova suggested she was likely to become the future CEO.

While speaking with Alex, she divulged that as early as her teenage years she was determined to be the model leader she felt she was capable of being. Her aspiration was clearly apparent based on the first few days that I spent with her and her team. As the youngest business unit leader in Gencova, she understood that all eyes were on her.

I was dazzled by the display of exemplary leadership practices for a person considered by some as “junior.” Her team of more than three hundred was spearheading a massive \$425 million project that was integral to the success of the entire firm.

They were ahead of schedule, under budget, and clearly functioning as a focused, engaged, passionate team on a mission. When I spoke with her employees there was a consistent sense of purpose, pride, engagement, commitment, and accountability. It was glaringly obvious that nothing would deter this team from accomplishing their mission.

I was interested to learn how she had developed and mastered her exceptional leadership skills.



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