

People Biz, Inc.

A SUCCESSFUL RECIPE FOR ACCOUNTABILITY IN YOUR SMALL BUSINESS

Accountability is a buzzword in the business world right now. Unfortunately, most of us have a negative understanding of the word. We often use the word as if it means blame and punishment. Therefore, we attempt to avoid it. The truth is that accountability is unavoidable. In the workplace, intrinsically everyone is accountable to someone. We are accountable to our peers, managers, customers and ownership. We are also accountable to our industry.

What if being accountable was empowering for you and your employees? Research indicates that rather than a negative force, holding people accountable for their actions and results has very positive effects on morale and performance. An environment of accountability produces vigilant problem solving, better decision-making, and greater job satisfaction. With an environment of accountability, people can develop their skills and be their best.

The issue I see with accountability is not the absence of accountability in business. Accountability exists regardless. The issue is how we think of and understand accountability and the environment under which accountability can thrive.

Consider these definitions of accountability:

- Accountability is a state of responsiveness.
- To be called on to render an account.
- Subject to giving an account.
- Non-judgmental feedback (accountability is no place for judgment, blame or punishment).

Here are some areas to troubleshoot in your workplace:

- Ambiguity is the enemy of accountability, so your first step, as a manager is to make sure that the people you are holding accountable have very clearly defined roles, job descriptions and duties.
- Accountability is an attitude, so look at yourself as the role model. Are you being accountable to your boss, ownership, your employees and clients?
- Do you have written expectations? Starting at the time of hire, if possible, review written expectations and standards of performance. You cannot expect something from someone who has not had the opportunity to buy into the expectation.
- Do you have permission; either implied or granted.
- Do they have training? You cannot hold someone accountable to something they have not been trained to do!
- Do your employees have a working plan - a project timeline, an economic model etc?

- Have I created a learning based environment? Is it okay to make a mistake or say, "I don't know?" Know it alls do not make good coaches nor are they coach-able. Creating a safe environment for mistakes encourages accountability.
- Are there real consequences? Consequences work best when spelled out before actually needed, in expectations for example.
- Do your employees have the talent and ability? Some people will not have the ability to do the job you are asking them to do regardless of having a well-defined role, a great manager and excellent training.
- Accountability is an attitude that you as leader will want to model; focus on *being* accountable rather than holding others accountable.