Building an Accountability Mindset

Seven Strategies for taking your team's productivity to the next level

By David A. O'Brien, WorkChoice Solutions

With very few exceptions, organizations of all types and sizes are heavily invested in trying to maintain some type of competitive advantage. In many cases, the key differentiator between high performing organizations and others is a culture of accountability where all employees demonstrate an accountability mindset.

What is an accountability mindset? Simply put, it's a belief shared by all employees (regardless of level or title) that others are counting on us to go the extra mile to achieve a quality outcome. Said another way, it's an acceptance of the obligation (and opportunity) to do more than is expected well and with a good attitude.

There are many factors that inhibit the accountability mindset but chief among them is lack of clarity about employer expectations. A dozen years ago when I was writing my first book, I remember uncovering a powerful truth about employee accountability and engagement that is still relevant today. Specifically, *no employee regardless of level or personality type ever intentionally shows up at work with a desire to fail*. I've discussed this truth with more leaders than I can possibly count and despite the occasional push-back statement such as, "you haven't met _____," most people believe this fundamental truth. The belief that there are exceptions to this maxim is often an attempt to excuse failed leadership.

Clarity of expectations is not only a key driver of an accountability mindset but also a basic human motivator. Although clarifying expectations is often seen as a leadership responsibility, the reality is that this task is everyone's responsibility. Despite this,

as leaders we need to ensure that all employees can easily answer such questions as;

- What are my key deliverables?
- Who am I responsible to?
- What is their desired outcome?
- What are my key timelines and milestones?
- What resources are available to assist me?
- Am I absolutely clear on what's expected of me?

Your team's capacity to answer these questions with ease will impact their attainment of desired outcomes. Teams must also fully understand what behaviors are expected of them.

In my work with leaders and teams all over the country, I continue to be struck by the lack of clarity that teams have about acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Sure there are many well written employee handbooks chock full of policies but all too often, few employees can readily identify the behaviors that support or inhibit team and organizational success. Without this understanding, most leaders and teams are at a disadvantage.

Creating clarity around behavioral expectations is not a complicated or cumbersome endeavor. Marvin Weisbord in his excellent book, *Productive Workplaces Revisited*, (Jossey-Bass Publishing) reminds us that "people support what they help to create." By investing the time to define a shared set of behaviors that drive team and organizational success, you not only help to build an accountability mindset but also a roadmap for bringing out the best in every member of your team.

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7 Things You Can Do Now to Build An Accountability Mindset:

1. **Assess your leadership.** As a leader, you set the climate for your team. Everything you do or don't do impacts employee accountability and engagement at some level. How well do you model the behavior you want from your team? Do you demonstrate the critical leadership characteristics of openness, integrity, resilience, trust, and respect? What are the top five characteristics of your leadership style and what impact do they have on your team and their level of accountability?

2. **Involve employees.** Solicit input from your team about their view of accountability and what they think are the key actions that embody an accountability mindset. Also ask them to consider the actions and behaviors that inhibit an accountability mindset. Identify the top 5 accountability behaviors that drive team success. Involving your team helps to build a common language, clarify purpose and increase their ownership.

3. **Show employees that you value them.** Research shows that one of the chief influencers of motivation and engagement is *feeling valued*. You don't need a complex program to show employees that you value them. Schedule 20 minutes of *Leadership By Walking Around* time on your calendar every week to let your team know that you're there for them and that you care about how they're doing.

4. **Communicate clearly and frequently.** Another key factor in building an accountability mindset is keeping your team informed about what is happening in the organization, especially around change. Beyond helping them to do their job with greater clarity and purpose, clear and frequent communication from you goes a long way in reducing or even eliminating the rumor mill.

5. **Link each person's role and contribution to the key goals of the organization.** The more employees understand how their efforts impact the greater good of the group, the more likely they are to help foster an accountability mindset.

6. **Give timely and specific feedback**. No one knowingly chooses to fail. People need feedback in order to improve their performance. Make sure your feedback helps and motivates them to improve while also reinforcing the accountability mindset behaviors.

7. **Emphasize continuous improvement.** Acknowledge that personal leadership and the accountability mindset is part of a learning continuum that through time and commitment allows us to achieve greater job impact and greater job satisfaction. Encourage your team to complete **The Navigator Inventory 2.0 assessment** to help create a development baseline while also helping to build greater clarity around the accountability mindset behaviors.

About David A. O'Brien:

David is President of CT based WorkChoice Solutions, a trusted provider of leadership and team effectiveness training, coaching and consulting services that was founded in 2000. He works with a wide range of corporate, nonprofit and public sector clients to help bring about sustainable improvements in organizational effectiveness. His first book, *The Navigator's Handbook, 101 Leadership Lessons for Work & Life* is available on-line and in bookstores nationwide. His second book, *The Navigator's Compass, 101 Steps Toward Leadership Excellence* was released in August 2015. To learn more about the scope of David's work in helping leaders and teams to be more effective or to arrange for David to speak at your next conference or other special event, please visit WorkChoice Solutions on line at: **www.workchoicesolutions.com** or call him directly at 860.242.1070.