EA Insights

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Dear Friend,

Finger-Pointing

Have you ever wondered who *"they"* are?

You know who I mean...the *"they"* who are responsible for things not being right at home, at work, in the community, in the world. Who are these *"they"* people who are constantly messing things up for the rest of us?

Think about this. How did the *"they"* get so much control over my life and yours? When did *"they"* ease in and take over without us knowing it?

All fingers are pointing in your direction, Mr. or Ms. *They*. It's time to show yourself and fess up!

OK, I've been a little flippant in my rant. But, you get the point. It's really easy to shift the blame to the infamous *"they"* for... whatever. And, while people apart from us very well may contribute to our situations, the *"they"* approach neglects any consideration of perhaps the most central person in the matter...the man or woman in the mirror.

So, let's devote a few minutes together in this month's *EA Insights* for a look at personal accountability. Yeah, *"they"* certainly may need some help but, if we're honest, so do *"we"*.

All the best,

June

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Personal Accountability...Seriously?
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The topics for my newsletters/posts come from any number of sources.

Last week I met with a new chief executive about training and coaching support for the organization's managers. As we talked about what she has been seeing thus far, and what prompted the call to me, a recurring theme arose -- the lack of personal accountability.

Hmm...

When leaders fail to model accountability and/or when they do not expect it from those around them, quite honestly, they're not leading. But, the personal accountability duty doesn't rest solely at leaders' feet. A lot of the employee engagement work being done today focuses outward only -- on how *employees* view their environment. Don't get me wrong; that is important and, in fact, it is a part of what we measure in our firm's organizational culture assessment. However, it is unwise to stop at the finger-pointing step. When we do, we forget that each of us has an obligation to the environment...that is, IF our organizations really are to be all that they could be. Yes, those around us -- the "*they*" people in our lives -- contribute to the culture in which we exist. But, each of us just may be a part of someone else's "*they*". So, when you think about it that way, how do *my* attitudes and actions affect the environment?

That's what spawned today's musing about personal accountability.

Let me pose five questions for you to answer about yourself...and answer honestly, please. Focus on yourself in the workplace, but for those of you who are not actively in the workplace now, feel free to use your volunteer work or neighborhood or home as the context for your thinking. Here we go!

Question #1: Am I in the right role?
One surefire way to sink an environment is to have people in roles that are not a good fit. It may be that they are ill-equipped. It may be that the role doesn't jibe with one's temperament. The bottom line is that the wrong person's is in the seat!

Now, yes, leaders do bear responsibility here as they carry out ongoing staffing and skill-assessment activities. But, remember that the real issue isn't always above the surface. That's why this question lands at the top of the personal accountability list.

If we're being honest with ourselves, each of us knows when we're in the wrong spot. We can just feel that knot in the pit of our stomachs because we know that we're in *WAY* over our heads, or that we absolutely loathe what we must do each day, or that we just

don't feel a healthy challenge anymore. And, faking it only goes so far. When an *"I'm in the wrong seat"* mindset goes into work with us each day, it has an impact on us and on those around us.

So, even if this first personal accountability question produces a hearty "yes" from you today, it's an important one to revisit periodically. And, if today's "yes" was hesitant, or if a "yes" just wouldn't cross your lips, it's time to be accountable and begin thinking about what your right role is -- period or now.

Question #2: Do I know what is expected of me?
I get the opportunity to coach supervisors frequently about giving ongoing feedback and performing meaningful formal evaluations. After all, a core supervisory responsibility is ensuring that people on the team know what is expected of them.

But..., each team member also has a responsibility to know what is expected of him or her. Let me use, as an example, an experience many of us have had as parents. Picture this: You've given your son or daughter an instruction, only to return an hour later to find nothing done. What is your response when your inquiry about why no progress has been made is met with "*I didn't know what you wanted me to do*"? Come on; say it with me. *"Well, why didn't you ask me?"* (*Been there too, haven't you?*)

What you wanted to get across to that person in your home is that wasting time and doing nothing were unacceptable approaches to the assignment. If uncertain about direction, get up and ask the question!

So, why are we often willing to proceed differently at work? Why is oblivion tolerable in that setting? If our organization is going to succeed, each person -- and that starts with me -- must take steps regularly to be clear about role and what's expected from that role. That's how Question 2 of our personal accountability test looks in action.

Question #3: Do I function in an effective and diligent manner every day?
Ever hear this lament: "*Nothing ever gets done around here.*"? Ever notice that at least some of the people raising this complaint are people who aren't actually *doing* anything?

Personal accountability Question #3 relates to the way I work each day. In an 8-hour day, how much time am I really working -- that is, putting in effort that is yielding an actual product or service? That question may be hard to grasp for some roles, so don't be afraid to ask it differently. How much of my actual workday is devoted to the activities on my position description that are helping to advance the direction and goals of my employer?

In our firm's process development and improvement work, for instance, we've had the chance to help organizations look at how people function. It's often eye-opening when folks are pressed to examine their utilization -- their actual, productive work time -- on a daily basis. Also, as organizations consider results-based approaches to the work, people's efforts to begin capturing accomplishments -- and not just time logged -- are telling.

If personal accountability is what you're after, don't wait until the start of a corporate utilization initiative. This is something to keep in mind daily on a personal level. While nobody is recommending becoming a robot, the question to ask is whether I am being diligent and effective in the way I work...more often than not. If you are able to nod that you are, good for you and keep it up. If not, determine 1- what productivity means for your role (remember, Q2's inquiry about what is expected of you) and 2- the kinds of tweaks to your day that are needed in order to improve.

Question #4: Do my attitudes and actions contribute to a productive and engaging work environment?
If you're like me, you know some undeniably hard-working folks...who also could use an attitude adjustment big time! In other words, these are folks who, without a doubt, can shout a resounding "*yes*" to Questions 1 - 3. The thing about them that makes you shake your head is the grief that goes along with each interaction.

Here's the thing. Just as you saw a face as you read the last paragraph, could it be that someone else saw you? *Ooh!*

If you are serious about personal accountability, it means being brave enough to do periodic attitude checks. Is the way I am thinking, acting, or speaking conducive to building up my environment? Or, am I openly, or subtly, tearing it down by being snarky? This can be a difficult question to ask, but it is an essential one.

Question #5: Do I make an unmistakable contribution to my workplace?
Before you respond too quickly, here's a translation that gets to the heart of this last question. *Do I earn my paycheck daily?* If you were paying you for what you do, would you get paid? I'm afraid that, if we're being honest, far too many of us would be reaching into pockets that contain nothing but lint.

Personal accountability means putting in a good, solid day's work for the pay that we're receiving. It means making an unmistakable contribution to the place that employs us. It means being more of a benefit than a liability. And, it means doing a gut-check informally, and even involving your supervisor and/or trusted others on occasion, to ensure that you're not losing ground.

So, those are my questions. How'd you do? Keep at it, if you're able to look in the mirror and smile with confidence about your responses. On the other hand, don't lose heart if you're not where you want to be in some of these areas;
decide to grasp the issue(s) you have
found and to make the necessary changes.

Wherever you are on your personal
accountability journey, know that you don't
have to go it alone. Call *Executive
Advantage*. We're here to help you
determine where you are now, and we can walk with you as you
maintain or grow your accountability muscles. We want to assist you
to be a greater contributor to your workplace. Contact us today.

About Executive Advantage

At *Executive Advantage*, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

To learn more about *Executive Advantage*, contact us **online** or at **(301) 280-5950**.

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Sidebar quotes:

"turn everything around, but I think there's something incredibly hopeful about that."
~Brie Larson

"When there's no one you can point to, or when something goes wrong, it's your fault - - that level of responsibility and accountability is pretty interesting."
~Matt Mullenweg

"For years now I have been talking about personal responsibility and accountability[.] Those are important principles[.]"
~Butch Otter

"The biggest challenge was becoming a leader and taking our team to the highest level. Feeling the personal responsibility to take the team to the next level."
~David Robinson

"You must take personal responsibility. You cannot change the circumstances, the seasons, or the wind, but you can change yourself. That is something you have charge of."
~Jim Rohn

"Man must cease attributing his problems to his environment, and learn again to exercise his will -- his personal responsibility[.]"
~Albert Schweitzer

"I see more people taking on the cloak of accountability, more people tiring of the blame game. If we are all connected..., then we are all to blame and all to be healers."
~Jane Siberry

"Honesty, integrity, and accountability, [are] the values, which should be the hallmark[.]"
~Louise Slaughter

"There is always a very delicate interplay between individual actions and institutional conditions. But there is no such thing as institutional conditions without any individual actions and no such thing as individual action without institutional conditions. So there is always personal responsibility."
~Cornel West