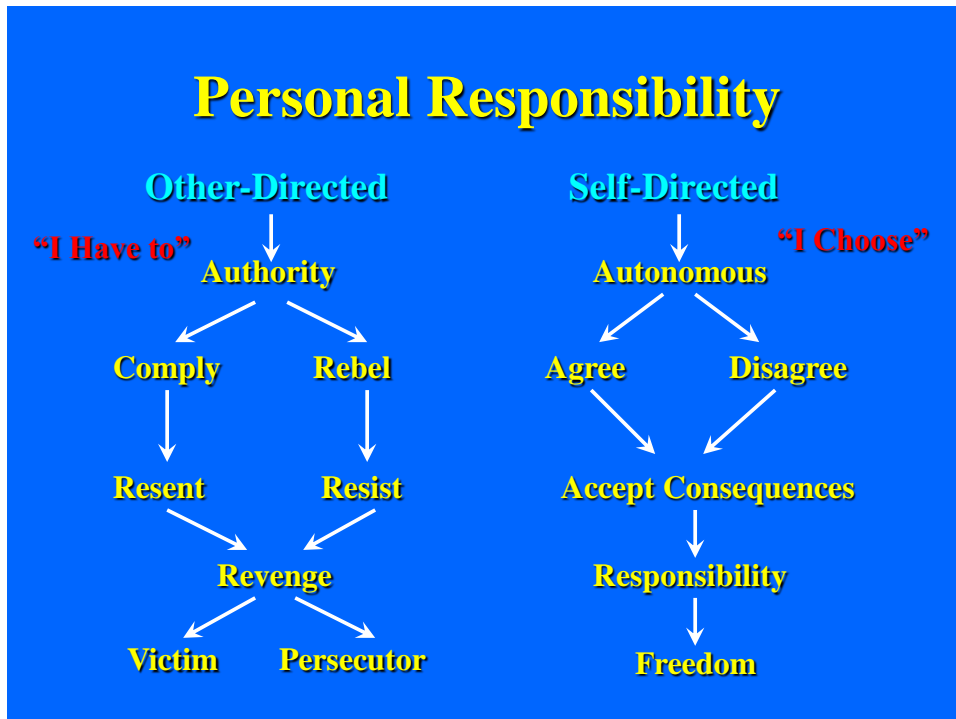


Holding People Accountable

by Kristine Ranger

Holding people accountable can be one of the most terrifying tasks of management, but it is a basic skill that must be practiced, modeled, and taught to others. Since holding a person accountable involves the potential of hurting feelings, managers tend to shy away from it and procrastinate, which often exasperates the problem. There can be a lot of anger and frustration in this area, especially when the targeted person is "Other Directed" and feels or acts like a victim, as shown below:



When an employer knows that an employee is doing something illegal, unethical, or otherwise damaging to the business, and he or she tends to be non confrontational, the problem can lead to additional issues, including reputation, employee attitudes, and team morale. Not holding an employee accountable can lead to a quick disintegration of your authority and respect in the eyes of your team members.

Here are a number of key points concerning holding people accountable:

1. Employees will assume that their behavior is correct unless it is corrected.
2. Holding people accountable is 90% communication and problem solving and 10% discipline.
3. You will never feel comfortable holding people accountable but your job as a leader is to forge ahead. **Our main fear in holding people accountable is that our interaction with the employee will be emotional. To get over this fear we must understand that there has to be emotion, or no change can take place.** This can be especially difficult for men who have been taught to control their emotions, or who have always worked in an environment devoid of emotions.

Welcome to the 21st century!

When someone is not performing correctly they are either unconscious of what they are supposed to be doing – an Unconscious Incompetent, or they are choosing not to perform as required – a Conscious Incompetent. Your goal is to move them into the Conscious Competency arena and so they will accept the consequences of their action, attitude or behavior.

As a manager or supervisor, your job is to determine if this is an educational or training need, an attitude problem, or a disengaged employee. When we hold someone accountable we are simply identifying the desired behavior and allowing them to take responsibility for their own performance. In other words, you are helping them become “Self Directed” where they can choose whether or not to comply. To make this happen, there must be some form of emotion. Nothing will happen without it. The easy way out is to fire the employee, but that should only be done if he or she is a repeat offender, refused to take responsibility, and has not complied with a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP).

The good news is that as you do this more and more, it will get somewhat less painful, yet the uncomfortable feelings will never totally go away. **A manager cannot manage without holding people accountable.**

The best way to hold someone accountable is to isolate the problem behavior and say “Tell me about it.” Or “Help me Understand.” To be most effective and non judgmental, use the 3 step feedback model:

For example: “Pam, I have been noticing that you and Sara have been having harsh words. Tell me about it.” After stating this, be quiet and listen. What you are doing is going right to the core. You are taking the problem behavior and putting it on the person’s shoulders without assigning blame or fault. You are simply stating what you have observed. By saying “Tell me about it”, you are opening the door to all possibilities.

In some cases, the person may be showing up to work late because of a personal issue that they have not told anyone about. By approaching the problem with no assumptions, you won’t look bad if they do have a legitimate concern, need special considerations or an intervention. In 90% of the cases, just using the ‘tell me about it’ or “help me understand” method will solve the behavior. You have brought it to a conscious level and there has been some emotion. The person now knows what is required and together you can work towards solving the problem.

In most instances, both you and the employee feel better afterwards. This is even true if the person refused to do what you asked or needed him or her to do because now you know where the person stands and you can take further corrective action, if necessary.

The Five Step Informal Disciplinary Procedure is as follows:

- Approach people within 48 hours of problem behaviors.
- Use the TMAI or HMU method describe above.
- Listen.
- Observe
- Follow up with verbal recognition to reinforce new behavior habits.

Ultimately, what we are trying to create is a culture where everyone on the team holds each other accountable instead of going to a supervisor with issues and problems, or gossiping with other staff. To do that, you will need to build trust model accountability, and get everyone comfortable with committing to a process or action step, even if they don’t agree with it 100%. Above all, your people need to feel comfortable expressing ideas, asking questions and sharing insights. If you work on those things, accountability will come too, but it is the hardest team skill to accomplish.