



NAILD: Accountability

“I thought Mike was going to do it!” “It wasn’t my fault, Purchasing dropped the ball!” “Don’t blame me, it wasn’t my idea!” Sound familiar?

These are typical excuses used by those not wanting to accept accountability or be held responsible for their actions but who want to be seen as the victim.

Accountability can be defined as “the state of being accountable, responsible or liable”. Even though we can’t be held accountable for every situation in which we find ourselves, there is much for which we are liable. It’s when one denies responsibility or disavows liability for the results of their actions or decisions that they tread into the murky waters of deceit. The potential reaction to these behavioral traits, by anyone in the firm, is friction, suspicion, distrust and lack of cooperation. The probable results will be inefficiency, unacceptable levels of productivity and errors made by the owner of the statements and, likely, by colleagues who resent being “played”.

Managers and mentors must be alert to words of denial and blame, by themselves, as well as by the employees. It is when a pattern of claiming victimization is apparent that immediate, appropriate steps must be taken.

To preclude such behavior, managers should implement the following approach:

- Set measureable standards for results
- Describe what the minimal results should encompass
- Confirm what is expected and how success will be measured
- Require updates and provide critical feedback

If results are found to be below standards, management must quickly address the reasons why. Initially, the goal shouldn’t be punishment, but rather, to ask what must/can be done to ensure that failure is not repeated. However, if management hears repeated claims of denial and/or suspects that blame is being directed toward others, intervention is clearly called for.

When preventive or reparative measures are needed, the following, additional actions should be considered.

- Determine if failure was due to lack of knowledge, judgment, understanding or insufficient procedures. Train accordingly.
- Search for “victimization” patterns.
- Emphasize that the goal is to find the solution, not to assign blame.
- Increase giving and asking for feedback.
- Emphasize a “make, keep and answer” personal commitments policy.

All must know that they will be held accountable for results. Just as important, those who deny accountability and resort to finger pointing must be dealt with; not doing so, makes illegitimate excuses



seem to be acceptable and undermines management's credibility. Rather than encouraging people to ask, "what else can I do", tolerating a "victimization" mentality justifies, in the minds of others, the pretext "it's not my fault". Promote responsibility, not excuses.

Take-aways:

- Let all know for what they are being held accountable
- If results are unacceptable, find the cause and resolution
- Be alert for "patterns" of denial and blame (claims of victimization)
- Show empathy when warranted, but demand ownership of actions & results

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