



Leaders: Hold Yourself Accountable

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

Several managers I know are fond of saying "we have to hold our people accountable." I think the process of making sure people need to step up to responsibility is a good one, but it really needs to start at the top. Unfortunately, I see many top leaders failing to hold themselves accountable first.

Let's envision a plant manager who has a problem of extremely low morale in the factory. The supervisors are telling the manager that people are upset because of no raise in 3 years and the threats of layoffs. They are tired of being abused and kept in the dark. The productivity is at an all time low, and the only way to take cost out is to further reduce the workforce. If you were that manager, how would you go about engineering a rapid turnaround in the performance of your plant?

One interesting strategy is push your chair back from the desk, stand up, walk down the hall, go in the bathroom, look in the mirror, and ask yourself some tough questions like the following:

- Morale is terrible in this plant, and as the manager in charge, how have you been contributing to this problem?
- What is keeping you back from fully holding yourself accountable for this awful situation?
- In what ways have you been trying to lay the blame on the supervisors, employees, bad economy, suppliers, business downturn, competition, etc., and how can you deal with the current situations and business environment in a more empowering and effective way for all concerned?
- What fundamental changes in the structure, behaviors, values, and vision are you going to make to completely change the environment?
- What behaviors do you need to change, starting right now, to build a culture of higher trust?
- In what ways can you change the attitudes of the workers by changing your own attitudes and behaviors?

- Since bonuses, or picnics, or parties, or hat days are not going to have much impact on long term motivation, how can you find out what really will inspire people and then implement the proper changes to the environment?
- How can you be a better mentor for your supervisors as well as train them to be better mentors to their own staff?
- How are you going to find a way to quadruple the time you have available to communicate with people?
- Do you need assistance to solve these issues? If so, what kind of help could you use and where can you find it?
- How can you know if or when it is time to pursue other opportunities and let someone with a different skill set handle the turnaround?

Yes, that is tough medicine, and yet I believe if the cold realities in these questions were internalized by some top leaders, conditions might start to change. It is only through the behaviors and attitudes of the top leaders that real changes can be made in an organization. Once top leaders step up to their own accountability, then the rest of the organization will quickly become enrolled in a new and positive vision for the enterprise.

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