

Leadership Barometer 129 Hold Yourself Accountable

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



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 the concept really needs to start at the top. Unfortunately, I see many top leaders failing to hold themselves accountable first.

Typical Example

Let's envision a plant manager who has a problem of extremely low morale within the team. Roughly one-third of the organization is working remotely due to a pandemic. The production workers are upset with all the safety mandates and having to wear cumbersome masks. They are tired of the abuse and being kept in the dark about future conditions.

Productivity is at an all-time low, and the only way to take costs out is to reduce the workforce, so job security is in doubt. People are scared. If you were that manager, how would you go about engineering a rapid turnaround in the performance of your plant?

Look At Yourself in a Mirror

One interesting strategy is to 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:

Tough Questions

- Morale is terrible in this plant, and as the manager in charge, how have I been contributing to this problem?

- What is keeping me back from fully holding myself accountable for this awful situation?
- When I call people at home to see how they are doing, might they interpret it as checking up on them?
- In what ways have I been trying to lay the blame on the supervisors, employees, the pandemic, bad economy, supply chain issues, business downturn, competition, etc.
- How can I deal with the current situations and the business environment in a more empowering and effective way for all concerned?
- What fundamental changes in the structure, behaviors, values, and vision am I going to make to completely change the environment?
- What behaviors do I need to change, starting right now, to build a culture of higher trust?
- In what ways can I change the attitudes of the workers by changing my 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 I find out what really will inspire people and then implement the proper changes to the environment?
- How can I be a better mentor for my supervisors as well as train them to be better mentors to their own staff?
- How am I going to find a way to double the time I have available to communicate with people?
- Do I need assistance to solve these issues? If so, what kind of help could I use and where can I find it?
- How can I know if or when it is time to pursue other opportunities and let someone with a different skill set handle the turnaround?

Step Up to Your Accountability

Yes, that is tough medicine, and yet I believe if top leaders internalized these cold realities, conditions might start to change. 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. Positive change starts at the top.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of: *The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals*, *Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online*, and *Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind*. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations.

