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Accountable Leadership

To survive, develop real leaders.



by Bethany Detrich

LEADERS WHO WANT TO survive don't have time to bemoan their challenges and play the blame game. Instead of seeing 2009 as a *year of recession*, see it as a *year of accountability*.

Mediocre leaders often can muddle through in good times. But add some market adversity, and deficits in leadership become painfully clear.

If you plan to be in business in 2010, you must implement some specific strategies today – and they come down to a single element that has gone missing: *accountable leadership*.

The Face of Accountability

What does *accountability* mean? That's hard to discern today. Businesses spend thousands of dollars to send future leaders to training classes. Yet they don't provide these leaders with any ongoing coaching. After training ends, employees are not even asked what they learned or held accountable for positive changes in performance or behavior.

Accountability means doing the right thing. Leaders must be accountable to themselves and to their people – both in checking on their performance and being responsible for their own. Accountability requires checks and balances.

Today, boards want their executives to

adhere to specific values and principals. Yet they rarely actually hold these individuals accountable. Instead, these executives spend time working *in* the business, but not *on* it. They may keep the business going, yet never actually move it forward.

Leaders often become trapped in a sea of spreadsheets, focusing on the numbers, ignoring key people who work with and for them and not requiring accountability from themselves or others. This is not leadership. And it won't work in an economy that requires leaders to be more accountable and do more with less. At a time of layoffs and cutbacks, leaders need to ensure that their people know what is expected, are measured based on their performance, and held accountable for the results.

A Focus on Results

Do your employees know what is expected of them, and how they will be held accountable?

The first strategy of accountable leaders is to define the top five activities key to each employee's success. Explain these activities and why they are important. Show how they will be measured. Set a time to review and inspect the results. Place a review date on the calendar – and stick to it. This is accountability – on both sides of the manager-employee relationship.

Second, leaders must stop working in the business to the detriment of developing their people. One client company is struggling because the VP of sales has not invested time in his employees, nor set expectations and required accountability from them. He gets pulled into minutiae and actually tries to perform his employees' tasks – missing the point of multiplying himself with a team. This

shows a lack of accountability. Rather than putting out fires, this VP should develop his people and re-create his positive attributes and activities in them. He must hold them – and himself – accountable for focusing on value-creating activities.

Accounting for Time

To be accountable, do three things:

1. *Start with focus.* Set metrics, develop people, and revisit the results. Leaders must explain what is expected and why. Rather than draft a list of requirements, create a laser focus on key activities. Rather than invest countless hours devising mission statements and listing key values, explain to managers and other contributors what this means in day-to-day operations.

2. *Hold people accountable for their schedules.* Many employees fail to execute the mission because they don't fit it into the daily schedule. Leaders must spend considerable time working on the business and training their people – not just putting out fires.

3. *Get out from behind your computers and get face to face with people.* Most communications take place by email and phone. But the best coaching takes place face-to-face. Leaders should spend face time with the sales team weekly and with other teams twice a month to stay focused. .

Leaders must invest time to develop people and hold them accountable.

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ACTION: Hold your leaders accountable.