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The ABC's of Accountability

able in the military? The answer is straightforward: To promote good order and discipline when performing our mission. Hence, devotion to duty, or the responsibility to get the job done, is expected.

In the Navy, some of the rules and regulations for which Sailors are held accountable are the Uniform Code of Military Justice, Navy Regulations, Unit Regulations, and the Navy Core Values. Nonetheless, the Navy Core Values are worth reiterating here:

Honor: *"I am accountable for my professional and personal behavior. I will be mindful of the privilege I have to serve my fellow Americans."*

Courage: *"The value that gives me the moral and mental strength to do what is right with confidence and resolution, even in the face of temptation or adversity."*

Commitment: *"The day-to-day duty of every man and woman in the DoN is to join together as a team to improve the quality of our work, our people, and ourselves."*

Accountability is essentially the product of an organization's values and beliefs about what is important, how business should be conducted, how relationships should be maintained, and its actions with regard to those values and beliefs. It has become abundantly clear that demonstrating organizational accountability is a critical responsibility of leadership. Furthermore, unless we undertake those practices that ensure accountability, we run the risk of undermining our credibility. After all, accountability is a leadership obligation. However, adhering to high standards of commitment and responsibility on a daily basis does not simply occur without tireless efforts.

Accountability can have a powerful practical value to meeting organizational goals, as well as resolving impending issues. Being accountable takes a grave amount of character, courage, and honesty. It is not a simple thing to do; either being accountable or imploring accountability. Being accountable is being responsible. The word *accountable* also has to do with an account, meaning the facts and figures, and not the excuses and the whining.

In an organization that embraces accountability, leaders have implemented a sound accountability system and, more importantly, enforce it consistently. Goals are set high; and the bigger the challenge, the greater the excitement and satisfaction when employees achieve their goals. Creating indicators that have real value is one of the greatest challenges of implementing an accountability system. However, no matter what you're tracking, comparing outcomes to previous indicators, then demanding improvement, is the optimal way to achieve anything. Hence, accountability measures lead not only to enhanced performance, but also to increased morale. In this type of organization, accountability energizes!

I believe that true accountability derives from an interconnected system that yields three parts: clarity, commitment, and consequences. Each component reinforces the other; take away any one and the system shatters. Therefore, the ABC's of accountability consist of the following:

A = Clear and concise goals that lead to outcomes – Here, expectations must be clear and precise and linked to outcomes. Finally, clarity includes asking, "Why?"

B = True commitment is extended way beyond the attitude of "I'll just try." That is just not good enough nor acceptable.

C = Consequences Complete the Circle – Here, consequences either clarify or cloud the expectations. Meeting recaps, in memo form or via e-mail, are the single most important tool in holding people accountable.

In an organization that models a culture of accountability, people do what they say they will do. As a result, personnel build credibility for themselves and for the organization by holding themselves, and each other, accountable. On the other hand, an organization that lacks accountability will be full of excuses for not meeting its mission because there's a sense that close enough is good enough since no one will notice the variance; or worse yet, a sense that the mission is arbitrary and makes no sense, so the best that employees can do is invest their energy in somehow beating the system.

Con't. on page 37

America has come under increased scrutiny for not adhering to the highest standards of business and moral conduct. Not escaping are the related consequences or what is deemed corporate accountability. There is no question that corporate America needs to be made more accountable to its employees and shareholders.

Similarly, the health care arena is in no way exempt from being in this spotlight. As health care has become more perplexing, there has been a refreshing accentuation on accountability. Leaders understand that they have to hold their people accountable; however, they aspire for accountability to have more than a negative connotation. Instead, they want accountability to become an energizing and positive force throughout the organization.

Experts on leadership define accountability as accepting the consequences, good or bad, for the outcome of a situation for which you are responsible. Accordingly, leadership proponents define responsibility as being answerable for the outcome or results of a situation. Hence, accountability can come in many forms. For example, it is expected in matters related to your job or your family. These are your responsibilities; things for which you are expected to be accountable, such as arriving at work on time or completing your assigned tasks. One of the most powerful forms of accountability is when it comes from commitments we have made either with ourselves, someone else, or an organization.

Some ways in which Sailors are held accountable in the military include, but are not limited to, fitness reports, getting placed on report, constructive criticism, or awards. Why do we hold Sailors account-

Junior Officer Country

Cont'd. from page 26

Unless we undertake practices that ensure accountability and unless we, as leaders, address issues of accountability, others will shape them for us. After all, the future of our organization may depend on how we provide leadership that demands accountability. Personal, as well as organizational, credibility and the pride of achievement are only feasible through accountability.

In conclusion, creating a culture that thrives on accountability can be a momentous undertaking; and it takes a genuine commitment from leaders at the top of the organization to set the tone and to support its managers in order to make it work. As a Department Head, I fully understand that I am accountable for the results of my Department. I also hold all of my personnel accountable 100 percent of the time. After all, when you have an entire organization committed to creating a culture of accountability in ways that are truly invigorating and growth oriented for your personnel, you will find improved success in achieving your business outcomes.

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