

Being Accountable: are we up for what it takes?

If there is one area in life people struggle with it is accountability - that is, our ability or willingness to be accountable for what we do, or fail to do. Being accountable infers many things, though the following short-list would immediately come to mind: integrity, reliability, trustworthiness, respect...

As far as the workplace is concerned, clearly, accountability is more than just doing your job. It includes a desire to make things better, to pursue excellence, and to do things in ways that further the goals of the organisation.¹ If you are anything like me, the following might occasionally be true:

- ✓ Saying yes when the response should have been no
- ✓ Saying yes before negotiating and clarifying competing priorities
- ✓ Or saying yes as you recognise that the task will negatively impact your ability to deliver on core tasks
- ✓ Even worse, saying yes out of duty, or fear of others' reactions
- ✓ Or saying no out of bloody-mindedness or resentment

And of course any of the foregoing might lead to the dreaded cry from a colleague, in effect the calling to account with "Dave, have you finished that paperwork yet?" And so many of us go on the defence, with:

- ✓ "Sorry, I'll get on to it now" - knowing that we've wasted time on non-essential jobs
- ✓ "S..t! Is it that time already... sorry... it won't take me long" - as we reluctantly move away from yet another gossip-fest
- ✓ Or the defensive belligerence of "What's the big deal?"

Unaccountable people are into excuses. They blame others, put things off, do the minimum (scraping by on that outcomes-based assignment), act confused or sometimes, play helpless. They redirect responsibility somewhere else, generally being quick to complain and slow to act.

¹ Dianne Schilling. www.womensmedia.com

In organisations, unaccountability is a highly contagious disease which is not only a reflection of the individuals but more seriously, a reflection of the dysfunctional nature of the cultural values that exist within the company itself.

As human beings, another consequence of our own unaccountability is that we tend not to keep others accountable. So we are caught in an ever increasing spiral of ineffective action and a downright failure to act.

That wonderful Australianism 'She'll be right!' both encapsulates and disguises the corrosive nature of our attitude to accountability. Its effect though, is to imprison us in our mental habits. We have every intention to hold ourselves and others accountable next time - yet our feelings do not contain the energy for change. At the next circumstance, we forget about our inner resolve.

Leadership: listening to our inner cues

One critical skill available to us, a skill which is in essence an intention of the heart, is to listen more deeply. Listening is not just about listening to others. It is also about how we listen to ourselves. How many times do we say 'I'll do it later' and deep inside, hear the failure inherent in that statement, its irresponsibility; and its repercussions.

Are we willing to admit failure, and act differently in future? As leaders, are we willing to require something more of ourselves and others? And importantly, are we listening to our inner cues - the thinking, unproductive habits and attitudes that habituate our world - and take action?

Those inner cues, the signposts to a new frame of mind, are all in our feelings. Feelings tell us so much, if we have the ears to hear their message. Poor feelings, rage, resentment... they are all about a conflicted and judgemental mind. Feelings are not responding to circumstances but to our State of Mind in that moment. Listening to our feelings provides us with the opportunity to experience a fresh way of engaging with life.

Those small inner cues are signposts to a new frame of mind, and are ALL in our feelings. Feelings tell us so much, if we listen...

Have you ever been surprised by a sudden turn in the road and later realised that you failed to see the road sign indicating the change of conditions? Have you come up to an intersection and deliberately ignored the orange light? Have you ever fought with a door that would not open then suddenly realised that you were pulling rather than pushing? How many tearooms have 'Please keep the kitchen tidy', writ large to an oblivious audience?

Our inner signposts are there for a commonsense reason... pointing us to the new and an opportunity to be free of all our pre-conditioned thinking

of our refusal to hear. Unless we are prepared to listen and act differently, life will stay the same. Unless we see that our thinking distracts us, that our feelings are not natural reactions to circumstances 'out there' but a reflection of our state of mind; we will continue to miss the inner signposts. They are there for a commonsense reason. They are pointing us to the new - an opportunity to be free of all our pre-conditioned thinking.

Dianne Schilling provides the following for improvement in being more accountable:

1. Listen. Careful, attentive listening helps you gather up-to-date, accurate information, identify problem situations and promote collaboration.
2. Question. Seek out information and ideas.
3. Invite and offer feedback.

That engagement, through listening and seeking to see the sign on the side of the road is an invitation to see the conditions ahead, and it is our state of mind at the time that determines how well we see.

Our responsiveness, our accountability, our behaviour and our connectedness to life's signposts (metaphorical or real) is what defines true leadership; in life and in business. ■ ■

Leadership beyond the expected through
understanding State of Mind.
It's a powerful thought isn't it?