

Blame: the buck stops here

Over the last couple of years [in fact for a lot longer] I have noticed how easily we all point the finger of blame 'out there'. In fact recently, I have been confronted by my own tendency to point without a second thought. *"...and the trouble is, if you don't risk anything, you risk even more. Take your life in your own hands and what happens? A terrible thing; no one to blame."* For me, like an arrow to its target, Erica Jong's ironic words find their mark.

The trouble is blame co-exists with punishment - who is going to pay for the failure and by how much? Attributed blame can imply the loss of your job, a promotion, humiliation; or even your life. And when it comes to blame, fear is the gorilla in the room. For those in positions of authority it is the hidden stick for control of subordinates, whose pervasive and nagging fear shadows their every action.

Blame seems to have a primal place in the human psyche, and while this 'stick' is associated with 'accountability' or work performance, its root in fear is unseen. Erica Jong's words invite us to consider that taking our lives into our own hands requires a deep understanding of that fear. When we do that, there is no regret, risk or fear of consequences. In this state of mind we can take action without fear and thus, willingly accept the responsibility that comes as a result.

Does this mean that we don't experience anxiety or emotional distress? No! We will feel the full force of our feelings while at the same time have the inner capacity to see them for what they are: our primal habit to blame, our inner fear and desire to point the finger somewhere 'out there'. What takes place next will be up to our ability to take the risk to live accountably in this moment.

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What is accountability really? It is an ability or capacity to willingly:

- accept responsibility
- navigate particular events or situations without fear
- declare the reasons for the actions or decisions taken
- indicate how important or significant the consequence will be, particularly in relation to the strategic goals of the organisation

On an individual level, it is the opportunity to move towards taking your life in your own hands, to live more consciously in a deeper appreciation of 'that I think'. In a recent Message Board [[We Are What We Do - May 2008](#)] I wrote on the 'trim tab factor' (an analogy meaning maximum ease to produce maximum impact): *"To understand this phenomenon, imagine a large ocean-going ship. In order to turn this vessel in a new direction we must first adjust the trim tab, which is a miniscule rudder on the larger rudder. This smaller rudder, which runs the length of the main rudder, is turned first, and the larger rudder then follows. In fact, there are no mechanics yet devised that could turn the larger rudder against the momentum of such a massive vessel without it breaking off. Only by first applying pressure to the smaller rudder will the larger one even begin to move, thereby changing the direction of the ship."*

I went on to say, *"This phenomenon brought home to me that some of my negative attitudes are so big [our large rudder] that it would take enormous mental effort to change direction"*, remarking that it had been my experience that no personal inner effort had afforded such change. What had brought change was the small trim tab moments when I had accepted my conflicted state of mind and the associated feelings with humility. The trim tab factor in this instance was my willingness to accept that my distress was all about my thinking and nothing else. This allowed me to SEE THAT I THINK - and that was all that was required.

I suggest that there is no other bigger attitude in human beings than that of attributing (or fearing) the accusatory finger of BLAME. If the buck truly stops here, being accountable is about reclaiming our lives, moment by moment, from the grip of fear.

In the business arena, creating accountable people *without* the agency of blame is a challenge; and an opportunity for powerful leadership. How do business organisations build a culture that encourages no-blame greater accountability? That will be the focus of our next Message Board. ■ ■