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YOU CAN'T HOLD PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE UNTIL YOU GIVE THEM THE RESPONSIBILITY AND AUTHORITY THEY NEED

“Accountability: Being required to answer for or explain”

“Responsibility: Authority, obligation or duty”

The Oxford Dictionary

“Accountability” has become one of the most frequently used terms in management today. Starting with the CEO all levels of management are, more than ever, being held “accountable” for their performance and for the performance of the people who report to them.

Holding people accountable is ultimately necessary. But it's not where you start. “Accountability” has a negative connotation. As the definition above states, it requires people to answer for or explain their actions. Instead of emphasizing accomplishments and successes, accountability tends to focus on *lack* of accomplishment and even failure.

On the other hand, the concept of “Responsibility” is positive. Electing or appointing a person to a management position or asking someone to assume responsibility for accomplishing a project shows trust and confidence in the person's ability to fulfill that responsibility.

But they must also be given the authority to fulfill the responsibility they are given. If they are not given the authority to go with the responsibility, they can't be held accountable.

The most effective leaders in any business or organization welcome and thrive on responsibility and the obligation that goes with it. Furthermore, because so much responsibility is placed on these leaders, they have learned one of the tenets of successful leadership: They delegate certain responsibilities to others and also give them the authority they need. Only then can they hold their people accountable.

Responsibility vs. accountability is not a matter of semantics. It reflects a basic understanding of human nature and leadership. Most people do not like to be held accountable. But they do welcome and usually thrive on being given responsibility. It is no mystery that successful companies and organizations have a culture in which everyone in them welcomes and assumes responsibility.

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Bob Denney is a recognized authority on strategy, management and leadership for law firms and companies. He serves as an outside Director on company boards and has also served as an interim CEO in turnaround and crisis situations. For further information visit our website at www.robertdenney.com.

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