

Growth Principle #9: Leadership & Accountability

Build a Culture that Allows your Team to Shine.

Eventually a growing company will expand beyond your ability to reach personally into every corner and crevice. In order to grow a business you have to build systems and mentor leaders, so that you can maintain your focus on the bigger picture. This article will help you create an organizational culture that raises up great leaders, rewards results, and makes it easy for people to do their jobs.

A one person company requires little management beyond self-discipline. A 5 person company is obviously much more complicated. And the need for leadership and accountability increases as the numbers rise. A 10 person company is less complex to manage than a 25 person company, and a 25 person organization is less complex than a 50 person firm. With growth comes the demand for additional structure and an expanding ability to cope with people issues. At the same time, too much complexity will stifle growth unless it is effectively introduced and embraced.

Strong leadership and building a culture of accountability are both crucial elements to increasing your company's capacity for growth. "Leadership," writes expert Peter Drucker, "is helping organization members see a bright and exciting future and collectively work toward it. It is the role of visionary, coach, cheerleader, pilot and listener all rolled into one."

Bottom line... you have to champion the values, attitudes and behaviors you want to see in your team. People will do what you do – not what you tell them to do. Learn to act as the guiding star that motivates them to keep moving forward, accept more responsibility and improve their skills. And don't be afraid to take on the role of advisor and 'great encourager' for everyone below you.

Once you've anchored yourself as a great leader and earned the respect and following of your staff, you can systematically implement a clear accountability structure that will sustain itself.

It is estimated that lack of accountability costs U.S. companies billions of dollars each year. The research also says that the majority of employees (85%) come to work each day wanting to be accountable. But only 45% continue to feel that way throughout the entire day.

So why the disconnect between employees intentions and the reality of the workplace? Building accountability in any work environment is a systems effort. It requires a clear definition of accountability that everyone agrees on, adherence to high performance, and a team mentality.

Six Critical Building Blocks of Accountability

1. Establish clear direction. Without a carefully crafted business strategy, you are essentially flying blind. A well thought out strategy enables you to properly allocate resources and clearly communicate your plans to employees, customers and other stakeholders.
2. Align people, process, and systems. Strategic alignment provides the ability to focus - through common processes, procedures and operating principles - toward the fulfillment of group objectives. It sounds complicated, but it really involves careful planning and coordination. Just think if each member of a marching band had a different idea of how to move across the field, or a different tune they wanted to play. You would have chaos and noise. Aligned, with everyone marching in the same direction and playing together, a precision marching band is a joy to watch.

3. Engage your staff. A study by ISR found that companies with high employee engagement improved 19.2% while companies with low engagement levels declined 32.7% over a one year period. People want to be involved in something bigger than themselves. You must allow group participation in decision-making and value staff input. Hire people who fit with your culture, know your vision, and have proven to be high-performers.
4. Lead the way. This one is obvious. Follow through on the demands you make of others. Exhibit the habits and traits you want to see in your employees. And when you make a misstep – admit it and openly return to accountability so that honesty and responsibility become the standard for everyone.
5. Monitor progress and evaluate results. Accountability by its very nature requires people to have ongoing information about their performance. And your initiatives will have no teeth if clear consequences and rewards are not attached to results. Be sure to support your staff and regularly review their results with them. Make life really wonderful for passionate, committed people who are willing to accept responsibility for their work - and make sure that lack of accountability is a bad place to be.

In an accountable workplace an "execution mentality" prevails. Activities, plans and effort are not enough. Instead, there must be an emphasis on measurable results and a 'get-it-done' attitude that is endorsed by everyone. People are expected to step up to challenges and they are given the guidance, tools and information to do so effectively.

By following these simple tips, you can enable your company to expand and grow while maintaining teamwork and high standards... as well as your sanity!