culture works

How to **Create Happiness** in the **Workplace**

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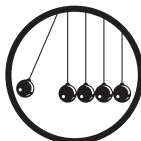*Chapter 6*

Shift Accountability

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Supervisor   **Co-workers**   **Impact**   **Organizational Support**   **Organizational Fit**

"It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird: it would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg. We are like eggs at present. And you cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad."

—C.S. Lewis, novelist and poet

The Ability to Count

Accountability is a tough term. What do you think of when you hear the word? I've heard: belittling, finger wagging, someone watching your every move, feeling of being in trouble or having done something wrong. Who's to blame? They must be held accountable! Even Thesaurus.com's first synonym for hold accountable is "place blame for wrongdoing."

Not exactly positive, happy dance material. But accountability is key to an extraordinary workplace culture. Holding people accountable is to witness both when someone is being successful and when they are struggling. When you see success, follow up with meaningful appreciation and recognition as outlined in the last chapter. High performers, and those who are set up for success, love accountability.

However, if you have someone on your team who is struggling, you've likely been asked to "hold them accountable." But what does that even mean? Hold them in check? Hold one's feet to the fire? Consider instead, holding their hand. Support, coach and guide them to success. To a point. (You knew that was coming, didn't you?)

If someone isn't pulling their weight or isn't being kind and there's no reaction, things get wonky fast. When you say nothing, you give unsaid permission to perpetuate bad behaviors. Subpar behavior or performance becomes normal, accepted. A new, low standard is set. Identity is questioned and pride is lost. Mediocrity sets in. Caring slips.

Let's be clear who's accountable for accountability—you are. Everyone on your team is responsible for being a stand for the team's success. However, the leader sets the bar. If you don't define expectations, no one else will. You are the catalyst. When you go there, they will follow.

Shift your team's thinking about accountability. Create a new definition. Make it the "ability to count," the ability to have someone's effort and energy count, to make a difference and an impact. Make it clear you will not let circumstances define commitment. Regardless of the weather, the economy, being short staffed, etc.—every day they choose how they're going to show up and prioritize next steps towards the finish line.

Adopt the Workable Integrity Checklist

A lack of integrity is often judged unforgiveable:

- He's a hypocrite.

- She's a liar.

- He can't be counted on.

- You can't trust her; she says one thing and does another.

These character judgments are part of the reason so few people admit to mistakes and lean on weak excuses for lack of follow through. This fear of being judged quietly destroys workplace cultures.

Yet we're all human. We've all failed to keep a New Year's resolution. We've all arrived late to an appointment. We've all had the best of intentions turn sideways. Our nature is to forgive someone who comes to us with hat in hand, owns their rubbish and commits to a different future way of being.

Imagine approaching integrity as a question of workability, mission critical to performance, rather than as a question of morality, ethics or character. This profound distinction comes from, "Integrity: a Positive Model that Incorporates the Normative Phenomena of Morality, Ethics, and Legality," by Werner H. Erhard, Michael C. Jensen, and Steve Zaffron (unpublished paper at http://ssrn.com/abstract=920265; copyright 2005–2009 Werner Erhard, Michael C. Jensen, Steve Zaffron).

Another way to think about accountability is to call it workable integrity. Accountability is about being count-on-able. When people follow through and do what they say they are going to do, work is easier.

Next time you're struggling with someone on your team, pull out the Workable Integrity Checklist inspired by the work of Werner Erhard (see the above article on integrity). Walk through each item. Where is the main disconnect? Then help them figure out how to repair it.

The Workable Integrity Checklist

☐ Nothing hidden.

☐ Being truthful and honest.

☐ Working from an empowering context.*

☐ Doing well what you do.

☐ Doing the work as it was meant to be done or better without cutting corners.

☐ Honoring your word.

☐ Doing what you know to do.

☐ Doing what you said on time.

☐ Doing what others expect you to do even if you haven't said you would do it.**

☐ Speaking up immediately when you realize you won't be doing this as expected or won't be doing it at all.

*Empowering context refers to doing the work agreeably. You're not disparaging, undermining or bemoaning the task. For example, a non-empowering context would be:

● "I'm only doing this because he said I had to do it."

● "This is stupid, but I'll do it anyway."

● "I think this is a waste of time, but someone's got to do it."

An empowering context means actively choosing and taking on a task, enjoyable or not, because you know the value and impact it brings to the work at hand. We are all responsible for our words and actions. If you think a task is a waste of time, come from a place of curiosity. Ask questions. Ask why the task is worthwhile. Explain to team members why a task is important.

**This is the one where people bristle. What? I didn't agree to this. Why do I have to do it? Simple. It's what's expected of you. If you are aware of those expectations, and unless you negotiate changes, you are responsible for meeting them. Think about the company bowling party when one of your key people didn't show up. Your expectation was he would participate or communicate if he wasn't attending. It's the same

logic parents hear from children: "You just said I have to go to bed, you didn't say I have to go to sleep."

Sip Truth Serum

The last box to check on the Workability Integrity Checklist is best represented by a conversation I had with a client who runs a large construction company. A marketing initiative started in the slow season was not just being put on the backburner, but let go, during high production. Some might find this short sighted from a strategy standpoint. Others might see it as a lack of integrity.

The CEO of this company is one of the most sincere, honest and thoughtful people I know. He stepped up and laid it out for his team without deflection or excuses.

"If we're really honest, the truth is we're not going to follow through on this marketing effort," he said. "When we were slow, I said this was a priority and it was. Now it's not, and it's simply not going to happen. That's really the truth here. And to say we're going to pick the ball back up and run with it would be to delay the truth and create false hope. I want to acknowledge all of you who have put a lot of effort towards this work. I apologize for work wasted. Priorities have shifted and we need to shift with them. Lastly, know I'm aware we still need a long-term strategy to secure steady work."

Naming this truth was powerful permission for the team. The monkey was off their back. They could stop feeling guilty for not making progress on a project that didn't require further attention. It focused them on what mattered going forward.

What's worse than walking away is renegotiating over and over and then never completing the task. Ever experience the self-defeating daily recommitment to a habit until you finally don't even believe yourself? Many employees can name a promise or commitment the organization has been making for years and never fulfilled. The intentions are good. But the continuous lack of integrity chips away at an organization's credibility. Clay feet become quicksand. Have the humility to pivot when needed. Be less committed to "looking good." Do what's best. Speak the truth and eat some short-term crow.

Clarify Character and Competency Expectations

Excellent leadership and seasoned managers share a common belief: **the belief in human potential.**

They believe in their people and they set the bar higher than individuals would for themselves. High expectations lead to high performance. When you give someone a difficult task, they take it as an assessment of their ability. They then increase their level of effort to prove you right.

Employees want to be successful. Expectations allow your team to self-assess their performance and feel a sense of accomplishment, pride and motivation to do more, better, faster. When expectations are unclear, nobody knows where they stand. The unknown leads to rumors, paranoia and mistakes. Clarify your character and competency expectations. What does it take to be a member of your team?

On the character side:

- What attitudes and behaviors are expected?
- What values and principles for working together need to be practiced?

On the competency side:

- What skills and expertise are needed to be successful in each position?
- What does excellence look like? What does subpar performance look like?

When you think of your team, how does each person fare on the character side? On the competency side? Your best players are excellent at both. Then you have those whose competency is extraordinary, but whose character is lacking. They can be jerks and at times toxic. Be a stand for their success, show them their blind spot and then coach them through it. Share how to shift their character (more on page 69).

Then you have the opposite, those the team thoroughly enjoys but whose capability is subpar. Get them additional training or a skills mentor to support the critical factor of Meaning/Job Fit. It's impossible to feel like your work is meaningful and worthwhile if you can't successfully complete it.

At the end of the day, though, everyone on your team needs character and competence. If the character doesn't shift and if the competency doesn't improve, they are not a good fit.

This can be heartbreaking, especially if you like the individual but their work simply isn't good enough. However, put yourself in their shoes. They want to do a good job. They care about the work and the team, and yet, the position just doesn't leverage their strengths. Repeated failure is painful and demolishes self-esteem. To keep them on the team is being cruel to be kind.

At the moving company, I made the common mistake of promoting an awesome producer to a management position. Before his promotion, he took tremendous pride in his acumen. His work was admired and he was the "go-to" guy for all things related to national moves. After his promotion, he struggled. Mistakes were made. The team questioned his ability to do the job.

He went from rock star to rock bottom in a matter of weeks. Luckily, he was relieved when I demoted him with dignity to his previous position. The Peter Principle applies here. What makes a stunning technician does not make a stunning manager of technicians.

If you have someone on your team right now who has neither character nor competency, time to do everyone a favor and set them free.

Renounce Unkind Niceness

Directly communicating concerns to someone requires vulnerability. Vulnerability is scary. So instead, people avoid, couch, lie, placate, agree and then turn and tell someone else what they really think, seeking validation for their feelings.

Most of us would agree we would rather have someone speak with us directly about concerns than tear down our character behind our back and, yet, the latter happens more often than the former.

The fear of being disliked is the root of backstabbing and why peer accountability within an organization is rare. When I meet with low-performing teams I ask the following:

- Have you failed to hold a co-worker accountable to be "nice" because you didn't want to hurt their feelings?

- Did you go ahead and do the work yourself, making assumptions about why the other person didn't complete it?

- Did you then feel resentful?

- Did you make comments about that person's inability to do their work to your spouse, co-workers, or supervisor?

If you did, consider *your co-worker never had the chance to respond or correct their behavior because you never spoke to them directly.*

We often think people won't like us if we hold them accountable, and yet we all have a story of someone who was brave enough to bring a blind spot to our attention, an act that changed how we acted and who we were. These changes often lead to self-actualization and richer relationships.

Chef Francis Mallmann remembers how the president of Cartier, the jewelry company, took him aside after a meal. The executive privately told him he didn't enjoy the food. Mallmann was trying to be a French chef, but the food was not French.

In that moment, Mallmann saw his blind spot.

He changed his path, cooking with fire, a nod to his Argentinian roots. "He had read in my life something that I didn't know but that was very important," Mallmann recalls. "Nowadays I feel that one of my responsibilities is to tell young chefs those sort of messages, not in a harsh way. But we must because you don't forget those things. They help you grow in life."

When I was running the moving company, I struggled with one of my right-hand employees. He was extraordinary, until he wasn't. He was struggling through a divorce made even more horrible by a custody battle. In an effort to be empathetic and understanding, I gave him space. Space to take care of paperwork, lawyers and court appointments. The team was also empathetic, but became overwhelmed with issues resulting from his lack of performance. I not only permitted his behavior, I enabled it. I regularly defended him to other team members. He was losing credibility with the team and I was losing credibility as a leader because I wasn't holding him accountable.

I finally walked into his office, sat down and said, "Listen, I know you're going through this awful divorce, but we need you. We count on you to lead operations. If you don't step it up we can't be successful. In an effort to support you these last few months, I've let the team down by not bringing this to your attention sooner. I'm struggling with how to support you and also meet the needs of our team. I'd like to sit down before the end of the week and figure out how to get you the support you need while still accomplishing the work we need you to do. If you need to opt out, if you simply don't have the mental capacity to lead operations right now, I understand."

I was shocked. Instead of feeling like I was kicking him while he was down, his demeanor changed. He sat up straighter. His eyes brightened.

All of a sudden he understood that he was both needed and wanted, and that his contribution mattered. His self-esteem had been suffering. He simply needed to know he was an important part of our team. In an effort to be kind, I had done him a disservice. The next day he came in ready to be the confident and capable colleague we always knew him to be.

Be a Stand for Someone's Success

Holding someone accountable tells them you value their contribution, that their work makes a difference.

If they don't do their work, or don't do it well, it matters. They matter.

When you're truly committed to someone else's success, you hold them accountable. You help them be the best they can be by communicating when something is amiss. To not say anything is to sit quietly by and watch as an individual's work credibility deteriorates.

I've seen an employee get fired because he smelled. To this day he still doesn't know the real reason why he was let go nor the reason why his co-workers avoided him at lunchtime. People were too kind to suggest he use mouthwash and deodorant. He would have kept his job if one person had simply said, "Dude, you might want to consider different deodorant. I'm just telling you because I would want someone to tell me."

When done with the intent to support someone in their success, reaching out to a fellow team member and making them aware of a blind spot is a kindness. You hope someone will tell you if you have spinach in your teeth. Or that you smell or you're overly chatty or you're not meeting performance expectations. While traditionally this is officially the manager's responsibility, in extraordinary workplace cultures everyone is a stand for everyone's success.

Explain *How to* Change

Often when managers are bold and bring to someone's attention a concern, they feel like their job is done. However, we make the mistake of telling people WHAT they need to change, but not HOW. For example, if you tell someone on your team they need to have a more positive attitude, there's a good chance they'll agree with you. "Man, you're right. Even my spouse tells me my attitude sucks." You were straight. They

agreed. Your job is done. However, if they knew HOW to have a more positive attitude, they'd already have one.

Help them by outlining the tangible steps they can take to shift their attitude. A good place to start is with specific examples of their negative attitude and alternative options. Share what helps you. Uncover core beliefs and suggest a shift in mindset. Ask the individual to ask others what works for them. Suggest searching for articles and videos that explain how to gain a positive attitude. Let them know you'll touch base in a couple of weeks to see what they've uncovered. Then check in.

Manage an Overdescriber

Take for example an overdescriber on your team. They drive everyone bonkers because a five-minute touch base expands into an energy suck-ing half-hour. This isn't the employee's intention, he doesn't understand. Overdescribers often go into too much detail in an effort to prove their worth and impress with their expertise, commitment or hard work. They seek reassurance.

In a one-on-one exchange: When someone starts getting into the weeds, interrupt them. Say something along the lines of, "Sam, I know you work hard and you're competent as well as thoughtful. While I know you want me to understand your entire process, I trust you and your choices. I don't need this detail. All I need to know is the project is on time."

Ask, "Can I share with you a blind spot I see?" Then upon an affirma-tive response, "Cool, I really appreciate you being open. Sometimes I avoid giving you the floor in meetings because what I believe should be a five-minute update tends to take you much longer. You don't need to explain or justify your choices. As a team we trust you and, in most cases, we just need to know what, not why. If we need to know more, we'll ask."

If they seemed miffed, give them a non-work related analogy. "Can I give you an analogy? If I asked you to bring a sugar-free dessert to the potluck, all I need to know is you're on it. I don't need to know all the different desserts you considered, that you tried Stevia, honey, palm sugar, and applesauce nor all the trials and tribulations you went through to get the right ingredient with the right measurement that worked with the rest of the ingredients. I don't need to know where you shopped to find the ingredients or who you consulted to figure out the

best recipe. (Pause and smile.) I know your diligence. I know it will be delicious."

Help them figure out HOW to avoid this behavior in the future:

- **Just give us the high-level update:** "I made a sugar-free cake and had to try four sugar-free substitutes before I figured out what worked."

- **Code word:** Have a word you two agree upon that you can use to kindly interrupt when they're headed into the weeds.

- **Provide a honing tool:** Provide a one-page framework with a few questions to help narrow down what to share at the next meeting.

- **But not every employee can be guided to a better place.** Then you face the hard choice to do what's best for the organization.

Know When to Stop Investing in an Employee

There comes a time when you've done everything you can to make a square peg fit into a round hole. I'm all for compassion, empathy and understanding. However I'm also for what's best for your organization and the individuals you employ.

If you're not completely sure if the time has come to stop investing in an employee's development, consider asking the following:

1. Is the missing skill a need-to-have or a nice-to-have?

2. Have you clearly communicated the peg is square and the hole is round and it's not a good fit? Give specific examples. Before setting someone free, you must give an employee a real opportunity to improve. Be clear and honest in how the individual does and does not meet expectations. Be direct and let them know if the gap is job threatening.

3. Once approached, has the employee sought ways to address this gap?

4. How long has this person been square and the hole round?

5. Have you tried to change the shape of the hole to accommodate this team member? This is not a good sign. Find people to fill the position, not positions to fit the people.

6. Are there other areas in your organization where you have a square hole and need a square peg? If not, set them free to find an organization that needs a square peg.

7. How much time, energy and resources have you put toward trying to "transform" this individual? What are the concrete measurable outcomes of these efforts? What long-term changes or lack of changes have you witnessed?

8. On days when this person is giving you his best, is their performance at the level you need for this position? If you answered no, this person is not right for the position. Unfortunately a square peg can have the best intentions to fit into a round hole. They can try really hard. They might even find a way to wedge in a bit. But if they don't fit, they don't fit.

Fire Toxic Rainmakers

On the character side, nothing erodes a leader's credibility faster than a toxic individual who remains on the team due to their "amazing" talent. They cause internal drama and frustration. They treat fellow co-workers rudely, knowing they can get away with it. They're entitled prima donnas. No one can stand them, and yet everyone accommodates them, because you do.

You set what's acceptable, what's valued, what's rewarded.

I know this, because I've been there. I've been the CEO who feels I have an "untouchable." An employee I think our team can't live without. My company suffered for my lack of vision, my lack of spine, and my refusal to put the team before the superstar. I lost the respect of my team.

Until I saw my blind spot. The moving company was bigger than any single individual. All of us relied on it to provide not only income, but meaning to our lives. I saw that no single employee has the power to make or break my company. I finally opened my eyes to the brutal emotional and financial impact of this employee's negativity, negativity I had permitted for too long.

Often I have clients who feel like they are held captive by an employee's extraordinary expertise, sales capability, industry connections, longevity in the company, or iron-clad employment contract, among other reasons.

Instead, consider:

- If this person were gone tomorrow, you and your team would rally and figure it out. You're successful because you're resourceful.

- The negative impact this individual has on the rest of your employees' productivity, loyalty and morale is far more expensive than any financial gain they create.

- You don't even know the half of it. People stopped coming to you with their concerns long ago.

- They are not nearly as fabulous and valuable as you think they are. Really, I promise.

- Most of your people think you're either blind or an idiot for keeping this jerk. They can't fathom why you put up with such behavior.

- You're not blind and you're not an idiot. Do what needs to be done. Now.

Be Intolerant to Improve Your Culture

"Culture change is a double-or-nothing deal. When leaders don't hold themselves and others accountable for living up to stated values, they make a bad situation worse. They create a schizophrenic organization ruled by duplicity, contempt and cynicism."

—Fred Kofman, philosopher and Vice President of LinkedIn.

What is unacceptable in your organization? What is intolerable?

- Verbal abuse

- Intimidation by a manager or co-worker

- Continued disregard and disrespect for procedures

- Territorialism and lack of willingness to collaborate

- Throwing people under the bus

- Passive aggressive comments in meetings

- Consistent lack of follow through on commitments

Intolerance doesn't require pounding your fist on the table. In fact, it is the quiet, clear, grounded intolerance that speaks volumes.

Communicate both what you're a stand for and what you're a stand against.

Imagine if someone on your leadership team makes an insensitive comment. Stop the conversation. Pause. Look them in the eye *with compassion and conviction,* and say, "Mary, I know in the past when you've made comments like this I've given passive permission by

grimacing and chuckling. The truth is it makes me uncomfortable. I'm not okay with this type of language in our organization. We say we value respect and it's just not in alignment with who we say we are."

Being intolerant marshals what it means to be a part of this team. Not just anybody gets to play. There's a pride that goes along with being a worthy member of a tribe.

I worked with one client and we came up with a short list of what they don't tolerate:

- Prima donnas

- Blame

- Grudges

- Gossip

- Pretense

- Know-it-alls

- Stiffs

- Micromanagement

- Stigma of remote workers

- Us vs. Them

What's your list?

Stop Workplace Bullying

Be a stand against workplace bullying. Don't minimize it. Don't turn away. This is more than a workplace issue.

When a 31-year-old firefighter-paramedic took her life in 2016, her employer uncovered that on-the-job bullying and harassment likely contributed to her duress.

First, understand what workplace bullying is.

Workplace bullying does not include feeling upset or unappreciated. Constructive feedback can hurt our feelings. So can being demoted or dismissed. Uncomfortable conflict and disagreements are not bullying (in fact these can be quite healthy.)

We also know the team that ribs each other mercilessly, laughs and bonds over the experience. While it's a pattern of behavior some might find offensive, in this case there's no malicious intent. The intent is to connect.

Workplace bullying on the other hand weaves together two vicious factors: a repetitive pattern of behavior and malicious intent.

Examples of repetitive patterns of bullying behavior include:

- Mocking, ridiculing or belittling
- Harshly teasing
- Yelling or screaming
- Condescending comments
- Vicious gossip
- Threatening words or gestures
- "Icing" someone out
- Withholding information
- Staring or glaring

The impact of these behaviors is intensified when done in front of others. Single instances of these types of behavior should be addressed immediately so they are not allowed to become patterns.

Malicious intent includes the desire to:

- Intimidate
- Degrade or demean
- Sabotage
- Socially isolate
- Defame character
- Retaliate
- Vilify
- Humiliate

Be vigilant and curious when claims of bullying present themselves. Don't make assumptions about either individual. Ask questions and listen carefully for intent. Consider if there's a power differential. Make sure no one is looking to shift focus from an underlying issue such as a lack of performance.

Listen and hold space for the truth to present itself.

Shifting your team's perception of traditional blaming accountability to the "ability to count" and "workable integrity" is essential for laying the

foundational empowering context to talk about performance success and struggles. When someone is struggling, renounce unkind niceness and be a stand for their success. Help them see how to shift. If the shift doesn't occur, be decisive. Set free those individuals who are not a good fit. It's the compassionate, kind next step for them and for the team. Lastly, hold fast to your high standards, and your team's trust. Your culture depends on it.