



# A Leader's Guide to Igniting Accountability

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# A Leader's Guide to Igniting Accountability

When you consider accountability in the midst of all your pressing leadership priorities, you may find yourself asking:

- How can I focus on accountability when people in my organization are navigating the highest stress levels ever recorded, including overwhelming personal battles?<sup>1</sup>
- How can I consider accountability when I am struggling to keep my business alive and recover from the economic downturn?

If your business is to survive in today's new world, you may feel like you need all the help and strength you can get. More than ever before, it seems critical that all employees and leaders step up and are willing to be accountable for their contributions and impact. This is no time for disengagement! It's an all-hands-on-deck crisis, and everyone's strength is needed to break free of today's economic riptide.

This begs a question: How can you possibly ensure survival if you can't find a way to ignite others to willingly step forward and link arms? Creating a human chain that helps you escape the grasp of the riptide requires that everyone bring their best and take personal responsibility for both their contribution and impact.<sup>2</sup> *Is that too much to ask?* It's easy to wonder when it seems so obvious to you as a leader.

Luckily, you are not the only leader trying to unravel this problem! There are a handful of leaders out there who already have found a way to igniting self-accountability among their people. You might call them *accountability innovators* because that is exactly what they are. Examining their strategy, and how it differs from today's typical approach to accountability may give you some ideas about to adjust yours to better fit today's new environment.

## What Today's Most Innovative Leaders DON'T Do

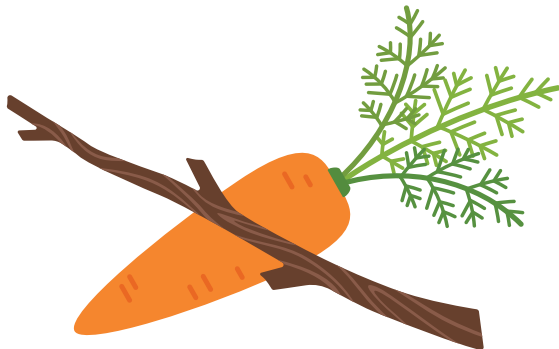
You may be surprised to learn the first major differentiator of today's accountability innovators. They have almost entirely moved away from the idea of "holding people accountable" as a major focus, if you can believe that. It seems counterintuitive, but it's true. They have chosen to get out of the trap of *reactive* accountability.

"Holding people accountable" in the most basic sense, is a reference to an after-the-fact response, one that implies disciplinary action for failing to perform to an expected standard. It is reacting to what has happened (or should have) and assigning blame, rather than focusing on proactive accountability where intentional actions ahead of time increase the likelihood of wise self-responsibility and choice.<sup>3</sup>



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If “holding people accountable” is your leadership paradigm, it turns you into an enforcer and emphasizes finding what is wrong with your people or their chosen approach. This virtually eliminates the likelihood of empowerment through coaching – the kind that ignites self-accountability and preempts future mistakes. You cannot expect enthusiastic whole-hearted contribution when the leadership approach is muddled by reactivity and a deficit-orientation.



## Carrot and Stick Strategy

As quick as accountability innovators are to dismiss a reactive accountability mindset, they are even quicker to toss out the “carrot-and-stick” strategy that generally accompanies it. They realize how badly this strategy interferes with getting to clear, true self-accountability and personal responsibility.

Trying to provide the right “carrots” or carry a big enough “stick” to make people work a certain way only offers employees an excuse for not taking personal responsibility. If you inspect the patterns in your own organization, you will likely find that “carrot-ing” or “sticking” people most often leads to employees blaming leaders, while continuing to deliver sub-par performance. It rarely inspires anyone to voluntarily and consistently bring their best selves to work.

This is especially true because reactive accountability conveys messages like: *You (employees) are not trustworthy. You can't or won't do it (without the carrot/stick). My job is to make you perform and your job is to do what I tell you.*

As you can imagine, this quickly translates to disengagement, which is as prevalent today as reactive accountability is:

- Outside the U.S., 85% of all employees are disengaged.<sup>4</sup>
- In the United States, 62% of all employees are disengaged (as of May 2020).<sup>56</sup>

These are important statistics for you to consider at this time, particularly. During recessions, the correlation between employee engagement and performance outcomes (things like profitability, productivity, customer perceptions and turnover) is higher than at any other time.<sup>7</sup> If you care about performance and want to recover from the downturn, then your company can't afford to ignore new and better ways to inspire accountability. There are much higher return-on-investment (ROI) strategies than doling out justice to those who fail to conform and stroking the ego of those who do.



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## Your Highest ROI Strategy: Proactive Accountability



So far, we've looked at what accountability innovators don't do. Let's now turn our attention to an example of someone who has completely transformed accountability, and with it, business results. Himmat Singh (pictured here), is an extraordinarily successful CEO in the healthcare industry, which as you know has been deeply impacted by COVID-19. His organization is no exception. However, it seems that they have only become a more efficient machine, and self-accountability has become more critical than ever before.

Himmat and his team of linked-arm-leaders have led the organization to a twenty percent year-over-year growth since he took over the company nearly four years ago. Additionally, the bottom line has also doubled during that time, and has continued to grow even during the COVID crisis.<sup>8</sup> Generally speaking, as a result of his leadership, his people are highly motivated and are willing to wade into the roaring riptide together in service of the organization. How does he do it?

His philosophy, like so many other cutting edge leaders, begins with the premise that his people are enough, that they are fundamentally good and want to be difference-makers. He recognizes that they have weakness, but he also knows that they have strengths and will use them in service of the shared vision if the right conditions are present. As you study Table 1 (shown here), you can see how he and other accountability innovators have turned the old accountability paradigm upside-down to create consistently strong results.

**Table 1: Reactive Versus Proactive Accountability**

	<b>Reactive Accountability</b>	<b>Proactive Accountability</b>
<b>Mindset</b>	Most people will not be accountable unless they are <u>made</u> to be	People have universal needs to contribute and add value; most will <u>choose</u> accountability if they understand why it matters and how to do it
<b>Language</b>	<i>"Hold people accountable"</i>	<i>"Create conditions for accountability"</i>
<b>Practices</b>	<u>Use external motivation</u> : carrot and stick strategy – use perks and strokes, or criticizing/shaming to make employees conform and perform	<u>Ignite internal motivation</u> : teach self-leadership principles; anchor in purpose, find individual "puzzle piece" and fit (strengths and contributions), clarify power and parameters, and co-create a performance pathway
<b>Results</b>	Disengagement, disconnection, distrust, stress, burnout, low productivity, and performance	Fulfillment, Work Joy, self-engagement and accountability, high performance and energy, growth, and progress (for individuals, teams, & business)

Let us consider together some new ideas for creating the conditions for proactive self-accountability and how leaders like Himmat are able to generate great success in such a short time.

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## Creating the Conditions for Proactive Accountability

Proactive accountability is not new. In fact, an 1844 presidential candidate was asked once how he managed to unify and ignite so many disparate groups of people to work together to build one of the fast-growing and most thriving cities in America. His response was simple: *"I teach them correct principles, and they govern themselves."*<sup>9</sup>

Principles are natural laws that govern human interaction, motivation, and growth. They work because they are "if-then" concepts. For example, if you coach instead of blame employees, then they are more likely to confidently assume self-accountability. You can know that this is a natural law (principle) that governs accountability because your own experience likely proves its truth.

**...if you coach instead of blame employees, then they are more likely to confidently assume self-accountability.**

For you to ignite accountability in others, you must create conditions so that people are willing to voluntarily take it. This means understanding, teaching, and coaching to the principles that ignite accountability so that people will voluntarily make the accountability choice. Principles are the first key to creating conditions for accountability, although there are also other factors necessary.

For our purposes here, let's think of these factors like pillars holding up a building. Each one adds critical strength to the overall equation that ultimately leads to igniting and sustaining proactive self-created accountability. A missing pillar means a sagging hole and can cause self-accountability to cave-in and become blaming or victimizing instead. You can see each of these pillars shown here.

## Pillars of Proactive Accountability

You can think of the pillars of proactive accountability as crucial elements to activating voluntary and enthusiastic self-accountability, requiring that individuals learn and apply:

- **Principles.** This means discovering and practicing the natural laws that govern self-accountability, starting with inside-out Self-Leadership.
- **Purpose.** This means knowing and aligning with the deeper "why" of the organization, as well as living from personal purpose (defining and honoring your unique difference-making contribution).
- **Puzzle Piece.** This means clear role understanding, as well as insight into personal strengths and how to use them to innovate, collaborate, and mitigate weakness.
- **Power.** This involves learning how to wisely use incrementally given authority (within specifically defined boundaries); it also involves growth through making empowered decisions and mistakes.
- **Pathway.** This pillar requires interdependent coaching between leaders and individuals to establish aligned performance goals, strategies, milestones, consequences, measures, recovery strategies, and checkpoints.



Principles



Purpose



Puzzle Piece



Power



Pathway

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When you examine these pillars from a high-level vantage point, you can begin to imagine how they work together to really ignite accountability. They are not forced from the *outside-in* because that would violate the very principles that govern true self-accountability. Proactive self-accountability is an inside-out growth process that must be chosen by someone who is a true Self-Leader and created over time. It looks like this:



## As you are no doubt seeing:

- **Self-Leadership** is the where proactive self-accountability (and self-engagement) are born.
- **Interpersonal Effectiveness** then increases as individuals become more self-accountable and more aware of their contribution and impact.
- **Team Performance**, including collaboration and innovation, grows as individuals are accountable to themselves and choose how they will impact others.
- **Organizational Excellence** and business performance are the fruits that flow from Self-Leadership and proactively chosen self-accountability, and its Interpersonal and Team Effectiveness by-products.

If you are like most leaders, Organizational Excellence is the fruit you are looking for! It is key to resolving the global pain that is felt across the world. We need organizations to be strong right now, and this means we need leaders who think differently than they ever have before. We need accountability innovators who will help us pivot into a new and brighter future. Specifically, we need accountability innovators who will help stressed out employees find strength in linking arms with others and find confidence again in their own valuable contributions and impact.

The good news is that you do not have to wait for the riptide to pull you under. You can ignite accountability in others - starting today. Like Himmat and others, you can build your leadership legacy and you can be a front-runner in the innovation of accountability. Your people will thank you for it, and because of it, they will be better prepared when the next tempest comes. And you can bet it surely will.

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If you are interested in learning more about becoming an accountability innovator, email [info@peopleacuity.com](mailto:info@peopleacuity.com) or register [here](#) for a free 2-hour virtual workshop, where you will learn the first tools Self-Leaders apply to create proactive accountability and self-engagement. You may also contact [info@peopleacuity.com](mailto:info@peopleacuity.com) if you would like to have a complementary accountability strategy conversation with one of our top-rated leadership coaches.

**People Acuity** offers leading-edge leadership development services in thirty-two countries across the globe. Their mission is to lift business performance by empowering leaders to win the hearts and minds of their people through self-driven Work Joy and proactive accountability. They provide measurable behavior change and a multi-modality learning approach, including globally-acclaimed virtual, live, and online learning supported by coaching.

This report has been written by **DeAnna Murphy** – the founder and CEO of **People Acuity** and principal author of *Shift Up! Strengths Strategies for Optimal Living and Choose to See You* – in collaboration with co-thought leaders, **Lisa Gregory**, and **Steve Jeffs**. DeAnna is a Top 100 Global Coaching Leader who has provided keynotes and leadership development experiences to leaders and teams all across the globe.

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<sup>1</sup> American Institute of Stress, May 2020

<sup>2</sup> *Picture credit:* <https://nypost.com/2018/08/06/beachgoers-form-human-chain-to-rescue-drowning-swimmers/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://thesystemsthinker.com/moving-from-blame-to-accountability/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/238079/state-global-workplace-2017.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/311561/employee-engagement-continues-historic-rise-amid-coronavirus.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/236552/managers-engaged-jobs.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/08959285.2020.1758702?utm\\_campaign=item\\_311270&utm\\_medium=copy&utm\\_source=link\\_wwwv9&journalCode=hhup20&](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/08959285.2020.1758702?utm_campaign=item_311270&utm_medium=copy&utm_source=link_wwwv9&journalCode=hhup20&)

<sup>8</sup> Data review with Himmat Singh on June 3, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1081/PAD-200055202>

