

PAYING IT FORWARD

Leading With Purpose

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2. Accountability

3. Above The Line

4. Staying Above The Line

5. What About You

6. Chief B's Key Leadership
Takeaways

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Accountability

After 40 years in the fire service, Chief Randy Bruegman founded The Leadership Crucible Foundation to reshape future leadership with a focus on fostering courage, empathy, and humility in leadership positions.

When we observe today's society, it appears that few take responsibility for their actions or obligations. It's a concerning trend that has led to a lack of accountability and an erosion of trust in our institutions. Many individuals and organizations adopt a "pass the buck" mentality, where they shift blame onto others or make excuses for their shortcomings. I've seen this behavior many times while working in local government.

Accountability: Are You Above Or Below The Line?

Instead of addressing a challenging and potentially politically risky issue, elected officials often choose to delay the decision-making process, effectively “kicking the can down the road” for the next set of elected officials to handle. These types of behaviors not only undermine their credibility but also create a culture that tolerates poor performance and unethical behavior. The absence of accountability in government, business and in many organizations today is evident when we read the news today. Several factors contribute to this, including the current political environment, lack of ethics, poor leadership, and the pervasive “win at all costs” attitude. These factors have led to poor outcomes for government constituents, sub par services, and products by businesses, and the development of organizational cultures that promote catastrophic errors for the people they serve.

The impact of this lack of accountability is evident in failed policies, weak governance, and a decline in public trust. Recent polls indicate that public trust in government, media, and other institutions is at an all-time low. According to a September 2023 Gallup poll, only 32% of Americans have confidence in Congress, which is a 6% drop from the previous year. Moreover, a Gallup poll conducted in June of this year found that newspapers and television news were among the least trusted institutions in the US, with only 18% of Americans trusting newspapers, down from 21% in 2021, and only 14% trusting television news, down from 16% in 2021. Additionally, a 2023 Pew Research

Center survey found that only 21% of Americans trust the government to do what is right always or most of the time, further highlighting the lack of accountability and trust in our institutions. America’s faith in major societal institutions has not improved over the past year, following a slump in public confidence in 2022.

Gallup recorded significant declines in public confidence in 11 of the 16 institutions it tracks annually, with the five worst-rated institutions being newspapers, the criminal justice system, television news, big business, and Congress.

These institutions stir confidence in less than 20% of Americans, with Congress being the only one in single digits at just 8%. These numbers indicate a significant lack of trust and confidence in our institutions, which can have far-reaching consequences for our society.

One of the significant contributing factors is the lack of accountability and transparency among these institutions. The public expects their elected officials, media outlets, and other institutions to be transparent and accountable for their decisions and actions.

Recent Trend in Americans' Confidence in Institutions

% Great deal/Quite a lot of confidence in each institution

	June 1-July 5, 2021	June 1-20, 2022	June 1-22, 2023
	%	%	%
Small business	70	68	65
The military	69	64	60
The police	51	45	43
The medical system	44	38	34
The church or organized religion	37	31	32
The U.S. Supreme Court	36	25	27
Banks	33	27	26
The public schools	32	28	26
The presidency	38	23	26
Large technology companies	28	26	26
Organized labor	28	28	25
Newspapers	21	16	18
The criminal justice system	20	14	17
Television news	16	11	14
Big business	18	14	14
Congress	12	7	8

GALLUP

To regain public trust, our institutions must prioritize ethical behavior, transparency, and accountability. The leaders should be willing to admit their mistakes, take responsibility for their actions, and work towards rebuilding trust with the public. This can only be achieved through clear communication, increased transparency in the decision-making process, and a firm commitment to ethical practices.

To tackle the problem of accountability in our society, we need to promote a culture of responsible leadership, ethical standards, and accountability. This requires transparency and accountability in all sectors of society, along with ethical codes of conduct and a commitment to hold individuals and organizations accountable for violating these standards. Responsible leadership prioritizes the welfare of employees and constituents over personal interests and takes accountability at all levels of the organization.

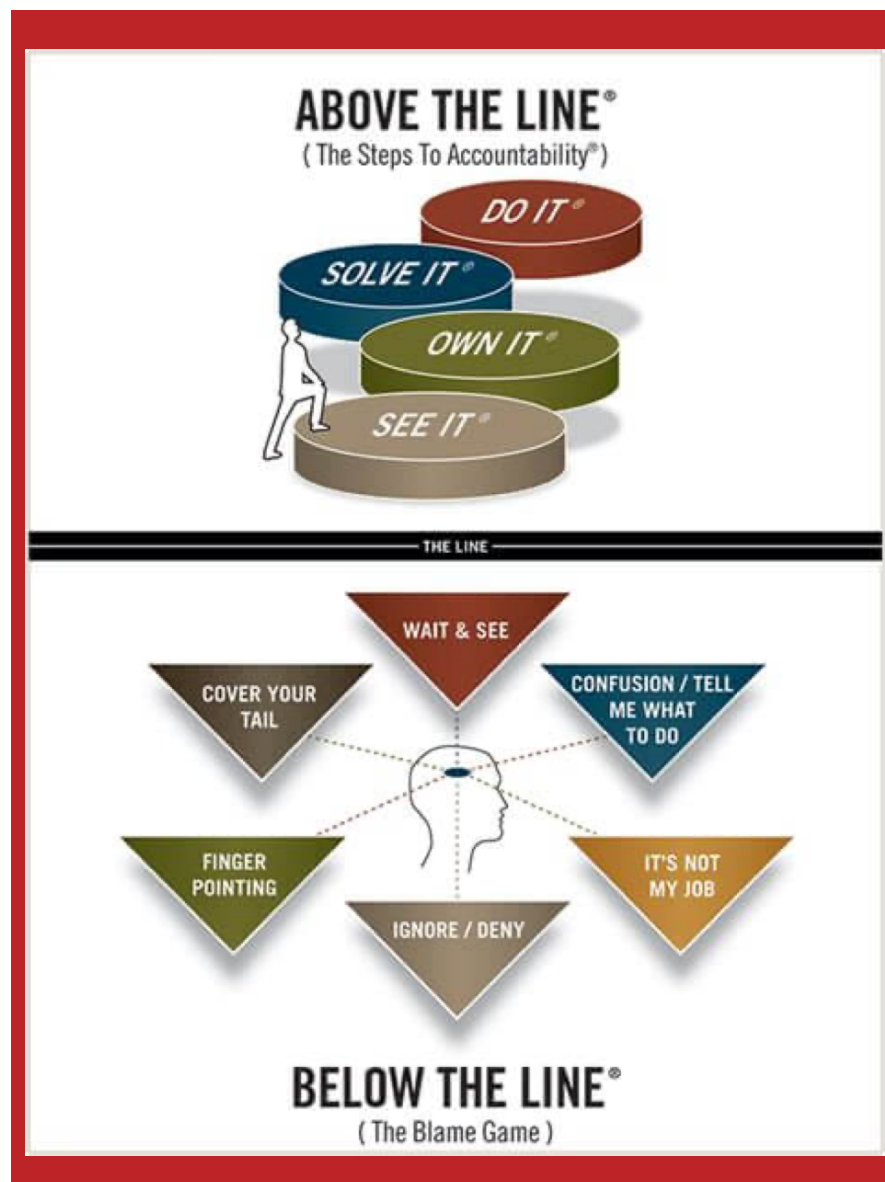
By promoting this culture, individuals and teams can develop a sense of ownership and commitment towards achieving their goals, leading to success, and establishing a culture of transparency. One model that has proven effective in building trust and promoting collaboration is Above The Line Accountability, a concept developed by Connor Smith, and Hickman in the Oz Principle which describes the attributes of the Above the Line mindset, and Below the Line mindset.

Above the line accountability is a term used to describe a proactive approach to taking responsibility for one's actions and decisions.

It is a concept that emphasizes the importance of individuals and organizations taking ownership of their actions, rather than making excuses, blaming others, or being reactive. Below-the-line accountability, or the "blame game," involves behaviors such as finger-pointing, denying problems, waiting for direction, and avoiding responsibility.

This victim mentality, which blames external factors for problems, can be harmful to personal growth and organizational success.

In the workplace, it can lead to disengagement, rumors, and a toxic environment. Those who adopt this mindset may feel powerless and lack motivation, resulting in poor performance and decreased productivity. It also creates behaviors such as gossiping and spreading rumors that contribute to the development of a toxic work environment.





WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE OR LOOKS LIKE WHEN WE ARE BELOW THE LINE:

Ignore/ Deny: I pretend not to know that there is a problem, or I deny that a problem exists or avoid seeking more information about the problem. (I choose not to see it)

It's Not My Job: I have awareness that something needs to be done, yet I avoid getting involved. This comes from the perception that there is no benefit from me putting in any additional effort to make things better

Finger Pointing: Trying to shift blame to others, laying accountability and power elsewhere.

Tell Me What To Do: By claiming I don't understand the expectations, I view myself as not being responsible for the results. The responsibility shifts to the person who gives me the instructions. This is a victim mentality.

Cover Your Tail: I fabricate stories to explain why I am not to blame. (These stories are usually crafted after the fact.) This can also take the form of hiding, avoiding meetings, not opening email, or answering the phone to avoid bad news or feedback.

Wait and See: I do nothing to see if the problem will magically fix itself or go away on its own. I procrastinate, not to let creative energy occur as deadlines approach, simply to avoid taking any action at all.

STAYING ABOVE THE LINE

See It: Whether you discover the issue yourself or someone gives you feedback that alerts you to the problem, ask yourself: "What has happened? What is the gap between reality and the desired result? How did this happen? (facts and context) What am I aware of now that I wasn't aware of before?"

Own It: What did I do, or not do, for this to happen? What facts did I choose to/not to acknowledge? What would I do differently? Take responsibility for your behavior and actions that may have contributed to the situation. How has my behavior prevented me from getting the results I wanted?

Solve It: Seek possible solutions to improve the situation and challenge your assumptions and beliefs. What else can I do? What assumptions am I making? How do I challenge these beliefs?

Do It: Take action to achieve the desired results, report progress, and overcome obstacles while remaining accountable to yourself and others.



WHAT ABOUT YOU?

So, where do you find yourself on the accountability scale, are you above or below the line? Do you find that you are taking actions daily to be accountable, or are you part of the blame game squad? The bottom line is this. Above-the-line accountability is a game-changer for personal success. When you adopt above the line accountability, you take control of your life and unlock your full potential. One of the biggest benefits of above-the-line accountability is that it empowers you to take ownership of your success. Instead of blaming external factors or other people for your failures, you recognize your role in creating the outcomes you experience. This mindset helps you identify the opportunities for growth and improvement that it takes for one to make positive changes. Another advantage of above the line accountability is that

it fosters a culture of honesty and integrity. When you hold yourself accountable for your actions and outcomes, you're more likely to be transparent and communicate openly with others. This leads to stronger relationships and greater trust, both of which are essential for personal success. Embracing above-the-line accountability is the key to achieving personal success. By taking ownership of your life and outcomes, you can build a strong foundation for growth and improvement. You'll be known as honest, transparent, and proactive, which will help you build stronger relationships and allow you to unlock your full potential. Above-the-line accountability is a crucial cultural attribute to develop healthy and successful organizations, but also is critical for the success and growth of each of us as individuals. By taking ownership

of our actions and seeking solutions to problems, we establish a culture of transparency, trust, and collaboration. This mindset not only helps us achieve our goals but also creates a positive impact on society. It is essential to recognize that personal and organizational success go hand in hand. When individuals take responsibility for their actions, seek solutions, and remain accountable, they inspire others to do the same. This mindset fosters a culture of innovation, creativity, and productivity, leading to growth and success for individuals and organizations alike. Therefore, it is imperative to instill above-the-line accountability in our daily lives, not just for personal growth but also for the success of our organizations and society as a whole. Above-the-line accountability is not a destination, but a journey towards personal and organizational excellence.

Leaders Are Readers

I believe that to be a good leader, one must be on a continuous quest to gain more knowledge. The leadership benefits of reading are wide-ranging. Evidence suggests that reading can improve intelligence and lead to innovation and insight. To that end, we provide a few suggested titles below for you to consider:

“The Oz Principle: Getting Results Through Individual and Organizational Accountability”

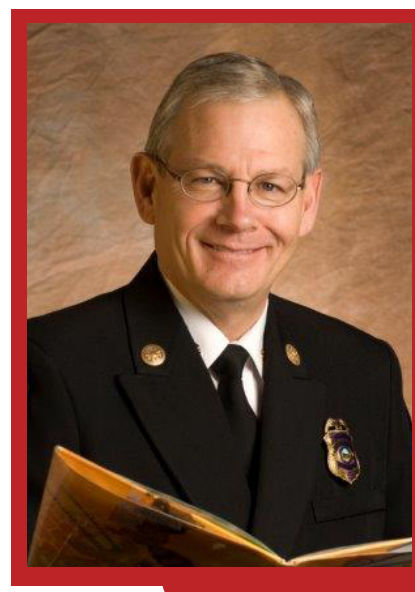
Roger Connors, Tim Smith, and Craig Hickman

Crucial Accountability: Tools for Resolving Violated Expectations, Broke Commitments, and Bad Behavior, Second Edition

Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillian, and David Maxwell

Uncommon Accountability: A Radical New Approach To Greater Success and Fulfillment 1st Edition

Brian P. Moran, and Michael Lennington



Chief B's Key Leadership Takeaways



Having the honor of speaking to great leaders in their profession in The Leadership Crucible Podcast, we make notes on the key leadership takeaways that we discussed. We share these personal and leadership takeaways—these insights—with you in hopes it will help you reflect on them personally or from a professional perspective. These may also provide potential talking points that you can discuss with your team or colleagues, which often create great dialogue insights.

- Above-the-line accountability is a crucial cultural attribute for personal and organizational success.
- A lack of accountability and transparency in institutions erodes public trust and creates poor outcomes for society.
- Accountability is essential to personal growth and organizational success.
- Above-the-line accountability fosters a culture of transparency, ownership, and solution-focused behavior that drives growth and success.
- Embracing above-the-line accountability empowers individuals to take ownership of their lives, build stronger relationships, and unlock their full potential.
- Instilling above-the-line accountability in our daily lives is essential for personal growth, organizational success, and positive impact on society.
- Above-the-line accountability is not just a mindset, it's a way of life.