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*Paying it Forward
Leading with Purpose
with Chief Randy R. Bruegman, (Ret)*

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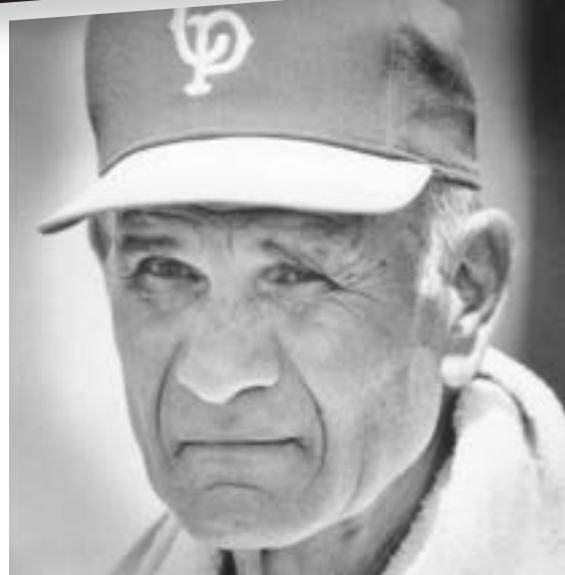
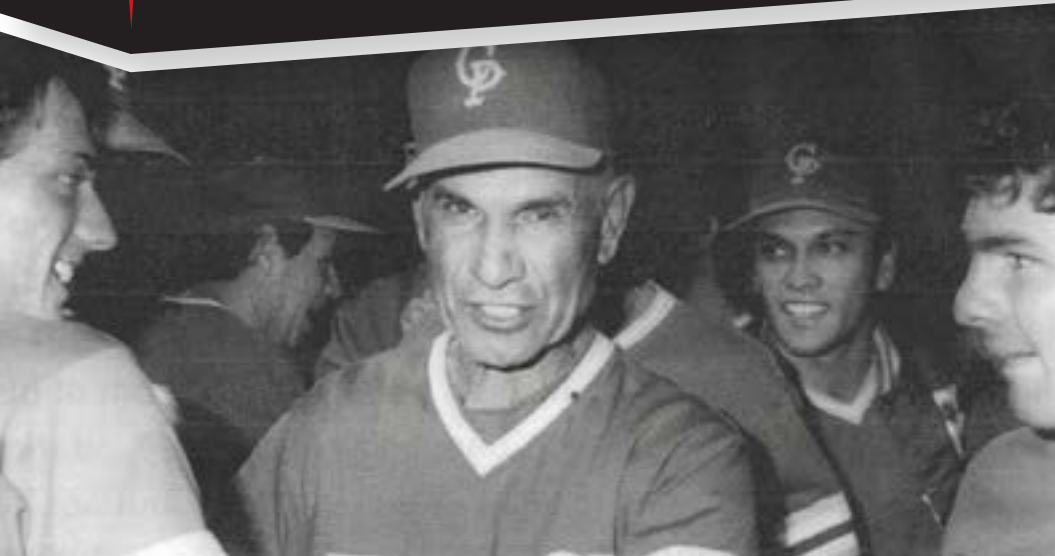
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READERS
ARE LEADERS



Want Excellence - Don't Widen the Plate

In today's society, so often we see those that hold leadership positions talk about the need to be accountable, yet take no responsibility for their own actions or the impact they are having on creating or making a problem worse. In our personal lives, we often negate our own actions and behaviors, shifting the blame for a bad outcome to some source other than ourselves. As we have just completed another political cycle in the U.S., we have witnessed the lack of accountability of many holding political office to take little to no responsibility for anything, always shifting the blame to others. This is a great example of the importance of accountability. When you refuse to be held responsible for your actions or decisions, you give away your power to improve things. When you replace accountability with blame, you also lose the ability to correct the issues that you are responsible for. Accountability is vital if you want to have success in anything you do, but it is the one thing that people have the most difficulty with.

When we hold ourselves accountable, we put ourselves in a position where we can make the necessary changes to be successful. When we look to blame others for our failures, it diminishes one's reputation and impedes our ability to be successful. When accountability is lacking, so is the effort and the end result. In order to be successful as an individual, a group, or an organization, we must focus our efforts on building a culture that has a strong sense of accountability for the individuals who are part of it and for the organization itself. Accountability within any organization starts at the top. It is impossible to hold lower-level employees responsible for their actions if you do not lead by example. When you allow the management in your organization to pass the blame on to others or get away with not taking responsibility for the decisions or actions undertaken, the employees will not feel it necessary for them to do it either. The slippage of accountability over time is analogous to the erosion of a beach as the waves move in and out, over time the beach disappears. The loss of accountability is much like that, for individuals, and organizations, that slippage occurs over time, until at some point, it no longer exists.



There is a great story told by the late baseball coach John Scolinos of what happens when we fail to hold ourselves and those that we lead and manage, or work and interact with, to a higher standard.

When coach Scolinos walked on to the stage in Nashville Tennessee in 1996 to give his presentation to 4,000 baseball coaches that had gathered at the Opryland hotel for their annual convention, he did so to a standing ovation. Impeccably dressed as he walked to the center of the stage, with a string around his neck from which hung a full-size, stark white home plate.

Speaking for over 20 minutes, no one asked him why he was wearing home plate and finally as he was concluding his comments about the topic of baseball, he said this:

“You're probably wondering why I'm wearing a home plate around my neck. The reason I stand before you today is to share with you what I've learned in life and what I've learned about home plate in my 78 years on this earth.”

He then asked how many coaches were in the room that coached Little League, and multiple hands went up. He said, “Do you know how wide home plate is in legal Little League?” After a pause one coach stood up and said, “I believe it's 17 inches.”

“That's right!” he said. “Well, how about those who coach at the Babe Ruth level, how wide is home plate in that league?” Another long pause, and soon somebody reluctantly spoke from the audience: “I believe it's 17 inches, sir.”

“That's right,” said Scolinos. “How many high school coaches do we have in the audience?” Hundreds of hands went up, and, as you could see, a pattern began to develop. “Well, how wide is the plate in high school?” Many responded - 17 inches - sounding more confident that they had previously, and he said, “That's correct. Do we have any minor league or major league coaches here today?” A few hand shot up. “Well how wide is home plate in the pros?” The same answer rang out: 17 inches.

He then posed these questions:

“Coaches, what do you do if one of your star pitchers can't throw a strike over that 17-inch plate? Do you widen the plate to 18 or 20 inches, so your pitcher has a better chance of getting it over the plate? No, you get a new pitcher. What do you do when a player shows up for practice late, or they're not in proper uniform or your star player shows up for the game and been out drinking the night before and they have come in hungover? Do you hold them accountable or because they are your star player do you look past their behavior?”

The point that coach Salinas was making was this: if we fail to hold ourselves and those that we are leading to a high standard, then how can we expect to develop an organization or our team to do the right things and operate ethically? Accountability is essential for a productive, successful life. By being accountable, we set the example for others to follow and inspire them to do their best as well. Leading by example. To be a good leader we must be able to provide a consequence when standards are not met, because if we do not, then how can we expect to ever achieve organizational excellence? When our personnel, our organizations, and our government fails to hold themselves accountable to those they serve, there is but one thing to look forward to: failure.



Coach Scolinos' message was clear to the coaches that day, and it is a message that resonates broadly today throughout all segments of society. When we are not teaching accountability to our kids, there is often no consequence for failing to meet standards, because we just widen the plate! His message that day: keep yourself, your team members, your organization, your family members, and those people you associate with to seventeen inches. Because, if you want to achieve excellence, you don't widen the plate.

Accountability

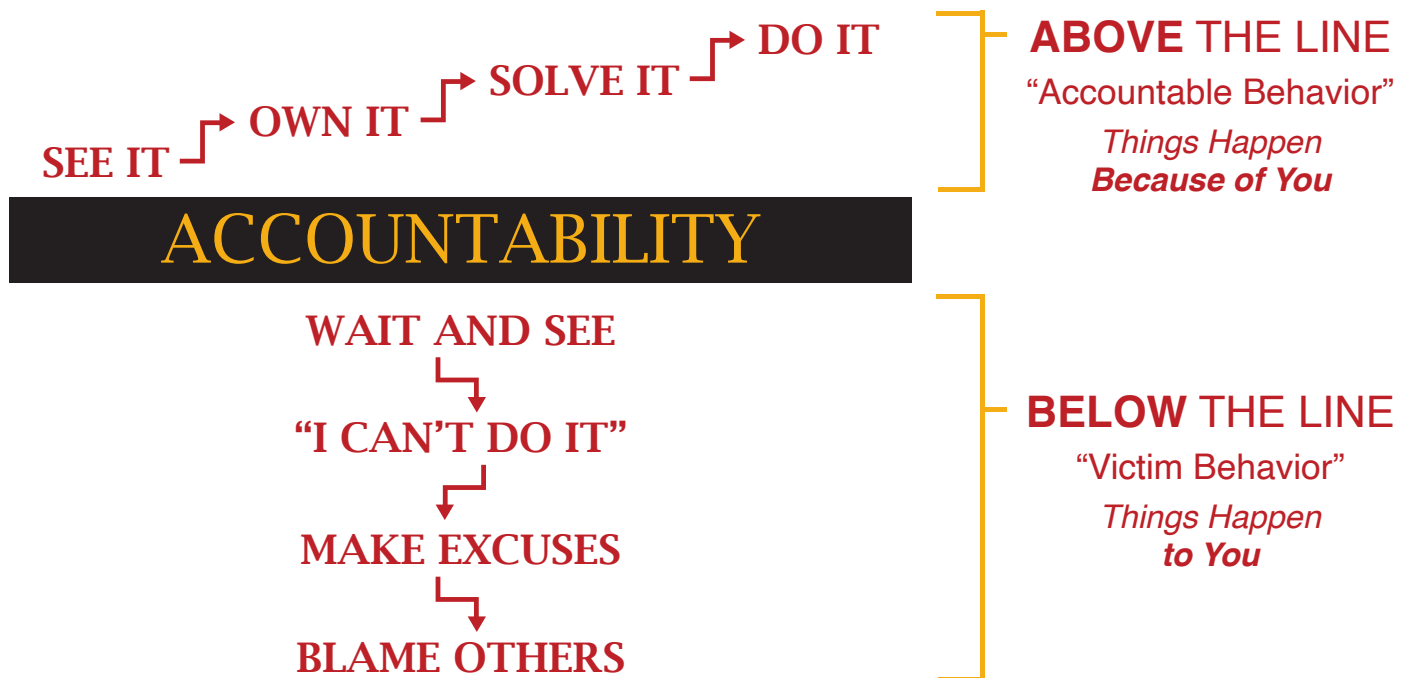
What is happening in your life, in your family, and in your organization? Has there been a slippage of accountability over time, and has it had a negative impact personally or professionally? JM Ryerson stated that "words don't mean a whole lot if your action don't back them up. In a battle between what you say and what you do, what you do wins every time in terms of proving your character." Your character and your ethics will drive your accountability.

Accountability is the obligation that an individual or an organization has to be answerable, take responsibility for its actions, and provide an account in a transparent manner. Achievement of this character trait in an organization requires every individual in an organization to own up to his or her responsibilities, their actions, and the results after that.

There is a simple and effective framework to promote and empower individual and organizational accountability, which was introduced in a book, **The Oz Principle** (a suggested read). The transformational model known as the Steps to Accountability. The Oz Principle offers a simple model to develop accountability in your life and in your organization. As leaders, if we want to leave it better than we found it, we must instill a universal thought process and behaviors that support the concept of above-the-line accountability, which is the idea that **if you see it, you own it; if you own it, you can help to solve it; and if you can solve it, you should just do it** (Connors, Smith, and Hickman 2004). When you can build a culture that incorporates this "above the line"

accountability into its everyday operations and its organizational ethos, just think how much more could be accomplished. Less time would be spent on rework, not having to address issues at the organizational level, as issues were handled at the lowest level, less staff conflict, as everyone is taking ownership, small problems stay small, as they are dealt with immediately; and it takes all of the time, energy, and resources employed in the blame game and finger pointing that often occurs and channels that energy into a consistent focus on organizational results. Just think what type of organizational power could be created if

everyone in an organization lived this above-the-line accountability philosophy; improved customer service, enhanced employee engagement, increased organizational performance and alignment, reduced time to complete projects and increased productivity. When competency in leadership is combined with an organizational culture that embraces above-the-line accountability, the result is a high-performance organization. This organization will be one filled with exceptional leadership throughout, which in turn will inspire the best effort throughout the organization, and it all starts with one thing: **Accountability.**



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 are discussed. I will share those with you in hopes that it helps you to reflect on your own leadership style, but also to provide some potential talking points that you can discuss with your team. Doing so is a great way to understand your teams, gain perspective on topics, helps you to gain a deeper understanding of how your individual team members think. It is an excellent way to build you team.

- ✓ Nobody will take accountability for problems if they think they will be blamed for them.
- ✓ Unaccountable leaders will always point to all the factors that were outside of their control to explain away problems.
- ✓ Unaccountable leaders will make excuses for poor outcomes and blame others or attribute failings to outside circumstances.
- ✓ Accountable leaders first look at how their behavior and decisions contributed to the problem before considering other causes.
- ✓ Accountable leaders resist the urge to blame their problems on other people or bad circumstances and focus instead on considering; the factors that contributed to the problem. They ask what can they do to help alleviate the problem, and are always seeking to improve future outcomes.
- ✓ Accountable leaders live by the edict, "the Buck Stops Here." They take responsibility and control of actions and attitudes that result in unwanted or poor outcomes.
- ✓ Accountability is the ownership of all of the circumstances that occur during your life. Understanding that you are responsible for the reactions, relationships, actions, choices, and especially the way we respond to situations.
- ✓ Accountability is never a one-time thing.

- ✓ Reframe the perspective of accountability to see it as a way to empower your people.
- ✓ Understand that shared accountability will inspire and create ownership in the results you are trying to achieve.
- ✓ Accountability builds trust.
- ✓ Accountability and Success: You can't have one without the other.
- ✓ If you want to build a great organization, you must build a foundation based on accountability and action that are above the line in all that you do.
- ✓ If You Want to Achieve Excellence-----Don't Widen The Plate!

"Accountability. We must reject the idea that every time a law's broken, society is guilty rather than the lawbreaker. It is time to restore the American precept that each individual is accountable for his actions."

President Ronald Reagan



Readers are Leaders

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. John Coleman's article in the Harvard Business Review, "For Those Who Want To Lead, Read," highlights that the leadership benefits of reading are wide-ranging. Evidence suggests that reading can improve intelligence and lead to innovation and insight, and, for example, some studies have shown that reading makes you smarter through "a larger vocabulary and more world knowledge in addition to the abstract reasoning skills."

Reading has many benefits, but it is underappreciated as an essential component of leadership development. To that end, we'll provide a few suggested titles for you to consider reading.

Leading with GRIT: Inspiring Action and Accountability with Generosity, Respect, Integrity, and Truth

by Laurie Sudbrink

The Oz Principle: Getting Results Through Individual and Organizational Accountability

by Roger Connors, Tom Smith, and Craig Hickman

Accountability: The Key to Driving a High-Performance Culture

by Greg Bustin



As we approach the
close of 2022 the
Board, National
Advisory Council and
the production staff
of The Leadership
Crucible Foundation
wish you all an
incredibly Happy
Holiday season and
blessing for a safe,
healthy, and
prosperous
New Year!