

**CULTURE
PARTNERS**

Empowering Your Culture with Accountability



In 1939, as World War II began, a young British mathematician named [Alan Turing](#) accepted a job at Bletchley Park working with cryptologists to crack the codes that Germans were using to coordinate attacks against their adversaries, including England.

One of the machines that Germans used to send encrypted messages was called Enigma. Turing, who had already cracked various codes and learned to decipher the messages that were being sent, saw the detrimental impact that naval Enigma was having on England's war efforts. German U-boats were planning and executing coordinated attacks on [North Atlantic merchant convoys](#), all but destroying the path of essential goods being sent from North America to England.

Turing decided to focus his efforts on cracking the naval Enigma code “because [no one else](#) was doing anything about it and [he] could have it to [himself].” He was empowered to take accountability for the problem.

In December of 1939, he achieved his goal. With Turing's decoding machine, Allied officials were now able to decipher encrypted messages within 15 minutes, allowing them time to launch counter-offensive maneuvers against German U-boat attacks. Historians have speculated that his efforts and contributions shortened the war by two to four years, saving countless lives.





On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, towards the end of World War II, victory had been unofficially declared in Europe, but Japan had not backed down. Shortly after assuming the office of President, Harry Truman needed to make a very difficult decision about how to officially end the war with Japan. After ordering the bombing of Hiroshima, Truman met with Paul Tibbets, the pilot of the plane that dropped the first atomic bomb.

“What do you think?” Truman is reported to have asked Tibbets.

“Mr. President,” Tibbets responded, “I think I did what I was told.”

Later in life, Tibbets rarely agreed to interviews. When he did, he maintained his stance that he had no guilt about his part in the war and that his actions were necessary, even though he was often vilified, drawing protests during appearances. He did indeed follow a direct order, just as he was commanded. He took accountability and, as such, accepted that he would often be the subject of hurt and anger. As a consequence, prior to passing away in 2007, he requested no funeral or headstone, citing concerns that further protests might take place at his gravesite. To some, he is a war hero. To others, a villain.

**Some decisions
have positive
outcomes; others,
negative.**

We typically read stories, and especially war stories, looking for heroes and villains. It's human nature to read stories this way. But the stories of Turing, Tibbets, and Truman are also about accountability. In life, we have to take ownership over the circumstances we face and the decisions we make.

**It's all about how
you frame your
definition of
*accountability.***

What is accountability?

As humans, we are quite predictable. When a negative outcome is expected, we naturally avoid stepping up and taking blame, especially if our livelihood/reputation is on the line. Avoiding consequences is in our nature.

During his presidency, Truman famously had a sign on his desk that read “The buck stops here.” Truman believed that

accountability was an important trait for leaders to have, and he practiced it.

True accountability isn't about blame or failure. It's about empowerment. Consider Alan Turing. He felt compelled to solve a difficult problem because countless people were losing their lives. He knew he had the knowledge and the ability to solve the problem, so he did, without being explicitly tasked to do so.



Accountability exists on a continuum.

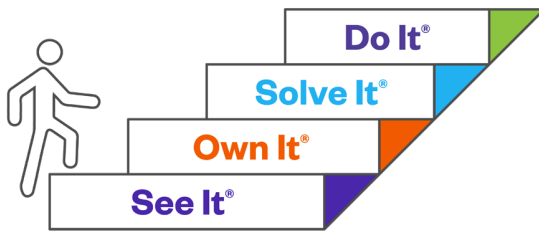
On one end lies **Command & Control**. On the opposite end is **Empowerment**.



In one of our two stories, Truman faced the difficulty of making a decision no one would ever want to make; it was a choice he has been often vilified for. In the wake of his decision, he continued to take the blame for the fallout of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, rather than letting it fall to the airmen who carried out the orders.

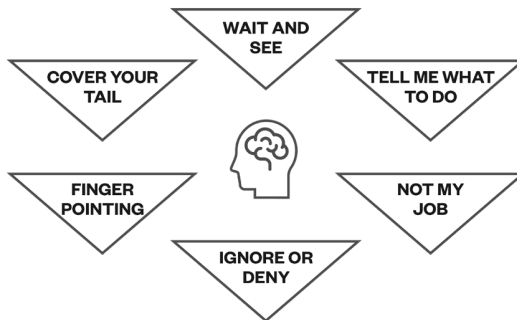
In the context of the workplace, the **Command & Control** view of accountability creates a culture of blaming and scorekeeping where **employees are expected to deliver a specific outcome; if this expectation isn't met, it results in consequences, possibly including termination.**

However, if we view our work through a new understanding of accountability – being empowered to find a solution for the problem at hand – then we don't "fail." Rather, we take control of the situation to begin with by making the choice to own the process and the result.



ABOVE THE LINE®

BELOW THE LINE®



In every situation, we have the ability to respond in one of two ways: **Above The Line** or **Below The Line**. Think of “the line” as the circumstance or event. For example, a team is working on a project for a client with a hard deadline, and there’s an issue: the servers crash, and the the project is in jeopardy of being lost.

The members of this team now have two choices:

1.

Inform the client that their project will not be delivered on time, thereby risking the client relationship.

2.

Work as a team to find a creative solution and attempt to deliver the project on time as promised.

While many people would choose option one because it is easier, it's obviously not the best choice for the client. Option two is more challenging, but when teams and individuals take accountability, they are able to more easily solve problems and exceed expectations.

When you're Above The Line, you see problems as opportunities to find solutions to the challenges you are facing. You take steps to ensure the job gets done, even if it's not necessarily within the scope of your duties. Above The Line people choose option two.

Below The Line, however, is where people play The Blame Game. They point fingers, ignore problems, wait for instructions from their managers, or push their responsibilities onto others. If you were Below The Line, you would blame the delay on the servers crashing and allow the client relationship to sour.

While it's normal to go Below The Line from time to time, it's not productive to stay there.

Remaining Above The Line as much as possible is how to achieve your goals.

How Accountability Can Serve You

Accountability and problems don't always go hand-in-hand. You don't need to face a problem to be accountable. There are many ways in which accountability can improve your work, your relationships with colleagues, and even your personal life.

Specific to our working lives, though, accountability is understanding that you, and every single person within your organization, is responsible for delivering the results the organization needs to achieve. Here are some ways you can leverage greater accountability.



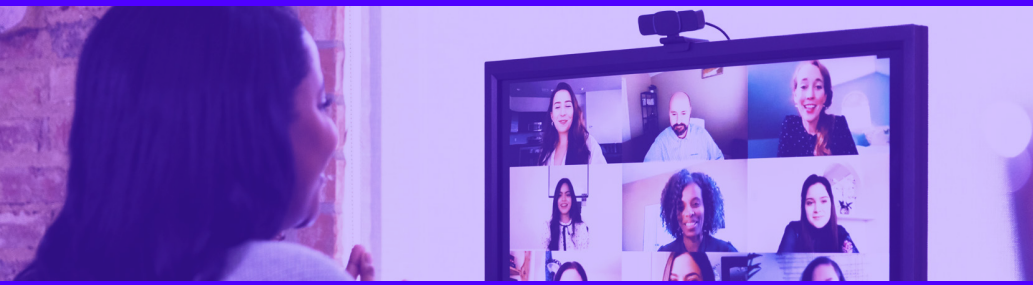


Increase Levels of Trust

In organizations with high levels of trust, there are usually a large number of people who are willing to take ownership over any circumstances they may face, whether positive or negative. In short, when you empower someone to take ownership over a situation, you trust that they will do what is needed to complete the task, reach the goal, or achieve the result.

Accelerate Business Performance

When your people are aligned to your purpose and the results the organization needs to achieve, they have more clarity about their roles and where their work fits into the big picture. With this clarity comes higher levels of productivity and fewer wasted resources.



Improve Employee Engagement

Giving your employees a sense of purpose in their work is a surefire way to increase engagement. While there are multiple ways to do this, a good place to start is by disseminating, repeating, and encouraging people to internalize your results. When people know what they are working toward, they are more likely to be personally invested in achieving it.

Decrease Attrition

When your teams are more engaged, they are more likely to stay in their roles for longer periods of time. Additionally, if they trust their leaders, colleagues, and the organization, they're more likely to feel connected to their work.



Foster Innovation

When people spend less time Below The Line, it unlocks and enables creative thinking, because people are solution-oriented. This is where innovation thrives and how your organization achieves positive outcomes.



How *Great Leaders* Inspire Accountability

82% of leaders struggle to hold others accountable.

This is a result of not knowing how to effectively empower your team to embrace ownership. Empowerment doesn't mean giving your employees license to do whatever they want, but it does give them space to take control of the circumstances they face while executing their job duties to meet expectations.

As a leader, you might think you need your people to take accountability (on the Command & Control side of the continuum). But in this mode, you can't force someone to do something without threat of consequence. All this does is create fear, disengagement, and a lack of trust between you, the organization, and your employees.

What you need is for your employees to take ownership. In order to do that, you must learn how to empower. Leaders who empower their people to take ownership see better results.

Here's how to inspire your people to take accountability.

1.

Define Results

The first step to instilling higher levels of accountability within your organization is to clearly define the results your organization needs to achieve. If one of your desired results for this year is a 97 percent employee engagement score, everyone in the organization needs to know. Ensure you are constantly communicating the expected results with your teams.

2.

Reframe the Definition

Once you understand the continuum of accountability, you can begin to shift your expectations and your view of how everything works within your organization. With your new understanding of accountability – moving from Command & Control to Empowerment – you will change your relationship with your teams and even with your own work. Reframing your understanding of the word changes its whole meaning.

3.

Connect the Dots

Not only does everyone need to know what the results are, they also need to know how to associate what they do every day to those results. This comes from giving your teams clarity on expectations. It's impossible to know what you are accountable for if you aren't clear on your role. Clarity allows us to connect with the purpose.

4.

Focus on Community

It's easy to find ways to point fingers and blame others within the organization who aren't part of your team. Breaking down these silos increases cross-functional collaboration and enables your people to source unique solutions to challenges, because more brains equal more knowledge. Additionally, it's harder to blame someone for a problem if you work with them more closely and frequently. A community mindset inspires connection.

5.

Create Positive Experiences

This is the single most important part of inspiring accountability.

Employees who have positive experiences within the organization are more likely to engage with their roles and peers. When employees are engaged, they can more easily take ownership over the results you need to achieve.

When creating positive experiences designed to inspire accountability, focus on these four key areas:

- **Feedback** – when you have an expectation, and someone is not meeting it, feedback will help set them on the correct path.

- **Creativity** – if you want to see your people take measured risk in their approach to solving problems by consistently asking “what else can I do?” you must also be willing to go above and beyond.

- **Investment** – ensure you, as a leader, are fully invested in accountability by connecting your work with the organization’s results, and modeling that behavior for your teams.

- **Follow-through** – ensure you do the things you say you will do and model Above The Line behavior.



Accountability is a Two-Way Street

Leaders need accountable employees. It's critical to the success of any organization. Most of us need jobs to sustain ourselves, and most organizations need employees to execute on their goals. In short, one cannot survive without the other. This is why accountability goes both ways.

As part of the new [Employer/Employee social contract](#), the employee is required to show up, do their job well, and contribute to a positive working environment. The employer's responsibility is to provide compensation, psychological safety, and an inclusive workplace where everyone can feel connected to the organization's purpose.

So yes, your employees are accountable to do their jobs well in a timely manner. But you, as a leader, are accountable to them. You need to create a culture where everyone can grow and thrive.

Accountability is not leverage you use to get people to do what you want. It's a mindset created by experiences. You must empower your people to be accountable. Throughout history, significant change only happens when people fight for said change (accountability) and are granted permission to make changes by those who make the decisions (empowerment).



It's A Journey

As you continue on the path to an empowered and accountable culture, you will encounter roadblocks and setbacks. Having a partner who understands how to overcome these challenges will help you achieve the results you are targeting.

Culture Partners has more than three decades of experience helping organizations – big and small, from every industry – on their path toward creating a culture that promotes and sustains accountability.

On your *culture journey*, we'll set you up for success using proven methods to help you achieve the right results.

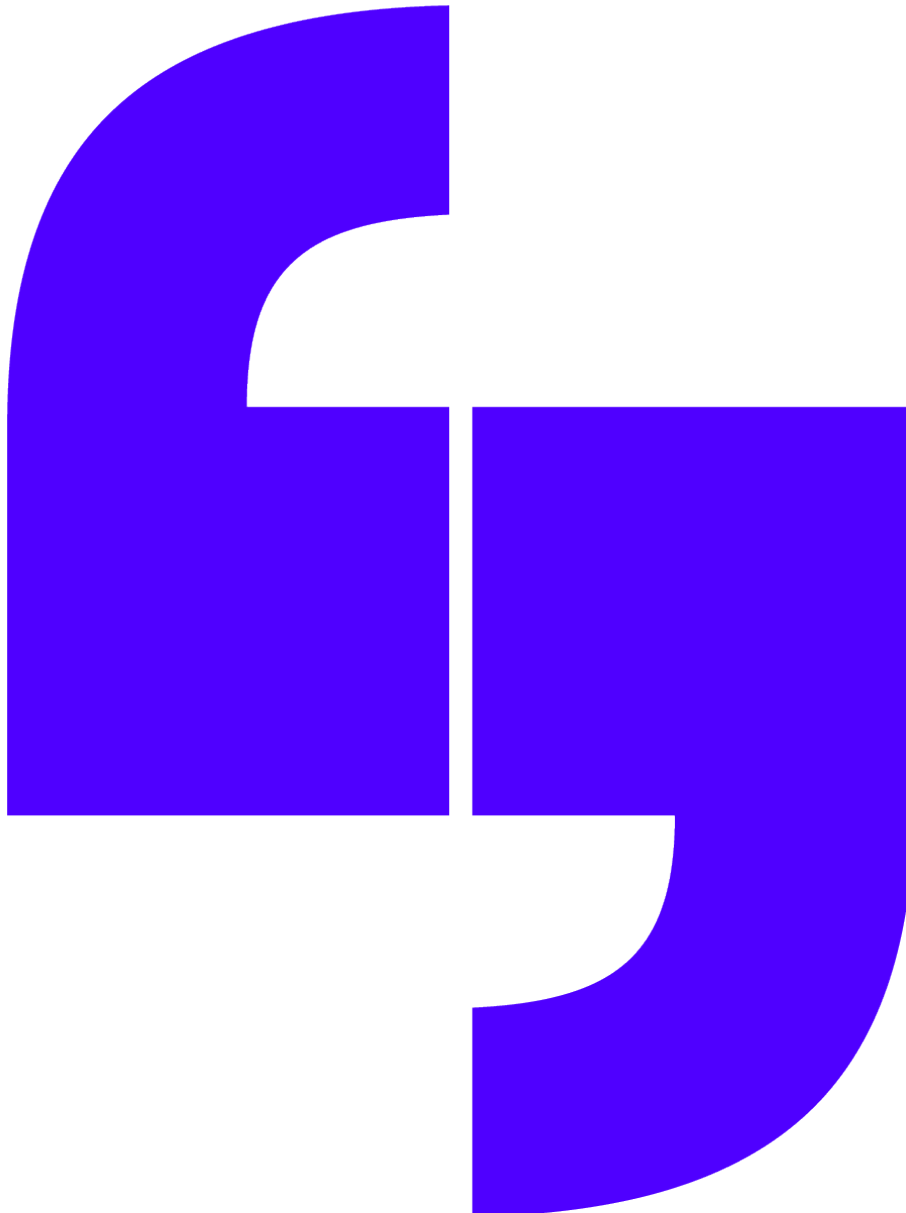
We don't send armies of consultants or leave you with roadmaps and no way to execute them. We use real, actionable tools and insights to help you achieve the results you are targeting.

Instilling accountability takes ongoing discipline and to make progress you must model the behaviors you wish to see within your organization. Perfection should not be the goal; rather, the goal should be progress toward shared accountability. When everyone in your organization, including you, is empowered to take ownership over the success of your organization, it creates a culture where people feel comfortable with the word "accountability." Most importantly, it gives them the opportunity to take it, creating a strong, results-driven culture within your organization.

From Our Clients

The key to our ongoing success is going to be our ability to continue to embrace our Cultural Beliefs & our willingness to accept personal accountability in delivering on our Key Results.

- **Tim Peoples**, *Former Kenosha Plant Manager of Ocean Spray*



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For over 30 years, our team has empowered thousands of clients across the world to harness the power of culture. Our human industrial-organizational psychological methods help organizations inspire action by connecting experiences, beliefs, and actions. We believe in the transformative power of culture to improve the professional and personal lives of people everywhere.

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