

account



ability:

stepping stones to SUCCESS

By Darcy Loy

Lack of accountability is a leading topic in today's workforce. It costs corporate America billions of dollars each year and has financial impact on our educational institutions as well. From employee theft to poor production of product and inefficiency, it is a serious problem. As facilities leaders we need to take ownership and strive to implement accountability in all levels of our organizations. Granted it looms as a daunting task, but with precise planning and implementation it has the potential to be successful.

As leaders the answers lie within us and we have the power to choose the right path for our units. We need to be able to establish a definition of accountability as well as a mission and goals for our units. We then pave the path for success. With orientation, persistence, trust, commitment and constant communication, we can achieve accountability.

The dictionary defines accountability as "the responsibility to someone or for some activity." Accountability is also viewed as responsible and professional behavior—being able to count on what is promised and

what is expected. However, if you walked into a room of 20 people and asked them what the definition of accountability was, you would get 20 or more different answers. Each of us has our own perception of what the word means, and that is where the challenge lies.

When accountability within our units fails, we miss deadlines and produce a poor product. We have to redo the task as the result of poor planning or inefficiency. This is inexcusable especially in these difficult economic times when we are struggling daily to be cost effective. Not only do we lose revenue where projects are concerned, but students may not choose our institutions. Lack of team accountability is evident when our buildings aren't clean, an incorrect lock has been installed, or the aesthetic appearance of our grounds looks unkempt. Today competition with other educational institutions finds us having to vie for students more vigorously than ever before. We cannot afford to have them choose another institution because we have failed to be accountable for our daily responsibilities.

Developing an Effective Performance Evaluation:

- Clarify the job role, description and responsibilities
- Maintain accurate records of employee performance
- Carefully design a measurement/grading system
- Adequate training for those administering the evaluations
- Consider multiple evaluations if employee had several supervisors
- Conduct reviews frequently and on an ongoing basis
- If at all possible pay for performance

TQM Key Elements:

- Customer orientation
- Commitment and leadership of senior management
- Planning and organization
- Using quality management techniques and tools
- Education and training
- Involvement and teamwork
- Measurement and feedback
- Culture change

Components for Facilities Investment Decisions:

- Common terminology
- A basis of shared information
- Decision processes that are clearly defined and incorporate multiple decisions points
- Performance measures.
- Feedback process
- Methods for establishing accountability
- Incentives for groups and individuals

Revenue is not the sole factor to fall victim to lack of accountability. We lose qualified and highly productive employees because their leaders aren't accountable themselves. Lack of accountability in upper management leads to poor moral resulting in discouraged and unhappy employees. They will in turn seek out better companies to work for.

Although these are significant factors in higher education there is one more important- our customer. Our facility units are in the customer service business. We strive to meet the

needs of our clients daily. If we are not accountable and fail in the eyes of our customer we lose *credibility*. They become disillusioned with our service and that is difficult to repair and reestablish. Stephen Covey states, "Accountability breeds response-ability." Without accountability and commitment our organization will fall short. Our ability to respond to our customers in a timely and efficient manner is diminished.

THE CHAIN

"Standards and interlocking goals are the glue that binds teams, sub-groups and sub-divisions together within the company's purpose and vision."

(Gene Kaczmarek)

To be successful accountability must be expected from all levels of an organization. In higher education it starts with the president or chancellor. It must then efficiently filter down throughout the institution. Robert Staub, founder of Staub Leadership Consults in Greensboro, refers to this as the chain of accountability. "Accountability is a chain of responsibility that is forged person-by-person, link-by-link in an unbroken cycle of effectiveness." (Staub, February 2005, p.1) As leaders we represent a significant link in that chain as do our frontline employees. For that chain to remain strong we must embrace a cohesive concept of what accountability is. A break in the "chain" is equal to a failed mission.

We exist in a world of diversity within the workplace; different ideas and perceptions, educational backgrounds and

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skill sets of our employees. We have different managerial behaviors and styles as well, making defining accountability a daunting task. As leaders we must take the lead and engage our employees in discussion. We must forge “our” unit’s definition of accountability. Establishment of a mission statement and vision, as well as core values for the unit is critical. This helps form a strong link within the organization. With those established an inventory of the unit must take place. We need to recognize what is working well and what issues need to be addressed. Established goals and core values can be used as benchmarks to see how well the organization is progressing. Once in place the next step is implementation of accountability within your unit.

ORIENTATION

“It’s not my job, I only work here.”

(Anonymous)

Establishment of accountability needs to begin at the interview level. You have to hire the right person for the job, perhaps not looking so much at their skill sets but at their personality traits instead. Do they seem honest and enthusiastic? Will they be a good “fit” within your organization? Skill sets are extremely important in an employee yet they can always be taught and perfected through mentoring and training. You cannot modify the character traits of an individual. Performance levels and expectations must be communicated the day they join your team. When the employee isn’t meeting expectations address the issue immediately before the issue progresses. Make sure your team is “assignment correct.” Set a focus for the organization and reiterate so each employee understands their role within the unit. Review the mission statement and goals of the department on a regular basis. You might consider implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM). TQM’s premise is mutual cooperation of everyone within an organization. Its principles encompass numerous key elements such as continuous improvement, customer focus, honesty and sincerity.

PERSISTENCE, COMMITMENT, AND TRUST

Once you have oriented staff to ac-

countability expectations you must adhere to your plan as their leader. Constant reevaluation of processes, procedures, and expectations put into place is necessary. They are benchmarks to evaluate performance. Mistakes will be made. A good leader recognizes failure as a learning opportunity. As their mentor you must address the issue, but in a positive manner. Praise the “try” and refocus the individual or team to correct the problem. This lends to success in the future. Constructive criticism is a valuable tool for an employee. It addresses strong and weak points within

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the individual and is a key tool for positive reinforcement and the building of confidence. Without consistent persistence of the leader employee momentum of the unit will falter and eventually come to a complete stop.

“It is easy to dodge our responsibilities, but we cannot dodge the consequences of dodging our responsibilities.” (Sir Josiah Stamp)

Commitment can be viewed as the driving force behind a successful organization. Without commitment the unit will likely fail. There must be commitment to the vision and goals of the unit from all parties. If the team is to be successful and accountable each member must be responsible for their actions, words, and decisions. As mentors we monitor the team-members’ commitment to accountability and we must lead by example. Staub states, “Accountability is only a word unless each of us is willing to ‘own’ our mistakes and actively engage in learning how to improve by listening to and acting upon corrective feedback.” (Staub, March 2005, p. 1) We must be committed to our cause.

“The pure and simple truth is rarely pure and never simple.” (Oscar Wilde)

Truth. Trust. They go hand in hand. Without one there cannot be the other. As facilities leaders we must be cognizant at all

times of how important trust is. Trust must exist between upper management and frontline employees if we are to be successful. With trust we meet goals and are accountable for our decisions. Without it we lose buy-in and fail miserably as a whole. Our frontline needs to trust in the fact that when failure occurs their leaders will also assume responsibility, as all levels are accountable. When there are successes the whole team receives recognition for the accomplishment, not just upper management.

Employees need to trust that as leaders we recognize their value to the unit and that we will defend decisions if necessary. As employers, we need to be able to trust that our employees are going to make good and ethical decisions. Trust that they comprehend the need to be professional and courteous when representing our institutions. We need to trust that they will view the team as whole and not have personal agendas which have the potential to harm the cohesiveness of the unit. As leaders we need to trust that our team members will “give their all” in order to make the department successful.

COMMUNICATION

“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.” (George Bernard Shaw)

The key factor that contributes to the success or failure of an organization is communication. Efficient communication provides cohesiveness within a department and is vital in order to enhance and sustain accountability. Leaders must effectively communicate expectations of job assignments and professional behavior as well as consequences when accountability fails in these areas. Establishing expectation agreements as well as policy and procedure manuals leaves no questions in regards to what is expected. Regular evaluations providing positive reinforcement will cultivate confidence and provide individual growth. As leaders we need to openly communicate current issues on our campus especially during these difficult economic times. In crisis situations communication is often skewed. Leaders must deliver factual and timely information so employees have peace of mind. It is pertinent that we communicate a job well done when a mission is completed. Employees appreciate recognition for their value and this bolsters moral and fosters enthusiasm. As leaders we must encourage team members to reciprocate communication, bringing problems, suggestions and new ideas to light.

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Lastly, we must effectively communicate progress and successes within the organization, as well as address failures. We need to provide regular feedback and positive input so all members of the organization are successful.

“To give real service you must add something which cannot be bought or measured with money, and that is sincerity and integrity.”
(Donald A. Adams)

The establishment and sustainability of accountability within

an organization is essential for success and credibility. Doing the right thing day after day is hard work and takes commitment from all levels in order for it to succeed. As facilities leaders we must lead the charge.

With the input of our employees we need to establish a mutual concept of accountability within the unit. Whether it being accountability in regards to customer service or perhaps efficiency we all need to be in consensus of the mission, vision and goals of the department. Accountability provides us with credibility

to the customers that we interact with on a daily basis. Whether a student, faculty member, vendor, or visitor to our institution, accountability drives effectiveness. We must constantly remind ourselves as leaders that each individual within our organization is a link within the chain of success. With accountability at all levels, we are strong and resilient and will hold fast to our vision and achieve success. ☺

NOTES

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