

# Accountability Part 2: An Organization in Chaos

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In my last blog post on accountability, I talked about how the misapplication of accountability can stunt the growth of your team. My next three posts will follow up on the concept of accountability – specifically the three levels of accountability in an organization. The topic of this post is the lowest level: No Accountability. And if you think this doesn't happen in organizations, think again.

An acquaintance (“Tim”) was relaying a story about some work he did with the Federal government as an auditor. He was called in to take a look at why the food service company at a military installation was losing money hand over fist, despite running a busy operation. The managers had tried everything they could, from increasing traffic to raising the prices as high as they legally could – and still they were losing money. Tim came in and noticed that their end-of-day reconciliation showed a ‘waste’ category of up to 40%. In other words, he believed employees were stealing from the business. To solve this problem, he came up with an ingenious solution. Tim placed buckets behind the counter, and everything that was labeled in the books as waste needed to end up in the bucket – and the buckets were weighed at the end of the day and reconciled with the books. As you can probably imagine, there was an instant, drastic reduction of the ‘waste’ the company was seeing, and the profitability issue went away.

Unfortunately, scenarios like this are all too common. There's a word for how this feels in organizations: chaos. I have actually heard people in similar situations describe their organization as “out of control.” In this example, the company was losing money and didn't know why. Employees were freely stealing from the company, and no one was reporting it. Chaos like this could be the death of an organization, and it's just too costly for it to exist in your business. Here are three things to consider when addressing the organizational chaos of no accountability:

1. **Trust has to be earned (and maintained).** Trust is a vital part of an organization's success. Without it, employees will disengage and leaders will micromanage. However, giving trust too freely can cause issues as well. And even when someone has established a reputation as being

trustworthy, it is essential that the trust is maintained by reinforcement.

2. **Empowerment without accountability is dangerous.** One of the biggest mistakes a leader can make is to disempower his or her employees. Empowerment is vital in keeping people engaged and developing. However, empowerment isn't a carte blanche idea. Too much freedom can be (and often is) abused. Accountability and empowerment are not mutually exclusive.
3. **Establish clear expectations and boundaries.** The beauty of the solution in the example above is its simplicity. The leader of this company either hadn't set clear behavioral expectations or wasn't enforcing the workplace boundaries. The simple solution clearly addressed the behavioral expectation and put the leader into a situation to address any boundary violations.

The chaos that comes from lack of accountability in organizations can be extremely costly and is the hallmark of failing companies, and it is unfortunately too prevalent. Keeping the above suggestions in mind will not only address the chaos when it exists but completely prevent it from occurring altogether. What kind of impact have you seen lack of accountability have in organizations? Please let us know on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#), and share this post with others who might find it helpful. Get the printer friendly version of this post [here](#).