

# Accountability Part 4: The High Performance Team of Your Dreams

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In the previous three blog posts about accountability, the foundation was laid for understanding what it means in the business context and how certain types of accountability can put organizations in risky positions or, at best, cause an inefficient use of resources. Now its time to discuss the highest level of accountability, which is seen in the most successful teams: Personal Accountability.

When Alan Mulally took over as CEO of Ford Motor Company, the organization was hemorrhaging money, poised to lose more than \$12 billion in one year. He brought his senior team together in a weekly meeting to take a look at the programs they had running and asked them to rate how things were progressing on a red (bad), yellow, and green (good) system. All of his executives rated their programs as green. The irony was not lost on Alan, and he pointed out to his team that it is difficult to have all green programs and lose money hand over fist. He encouraged them to be honest with him so they could start to address their issues. However, they continued to report their programs as green in subsequent meetings, clearly afraid that if they reported as red, or even yellow, their jobs might be on the line. There was one person out of the group, however, who emerged at a subsequent meeting and gave his program a red rating. The room became silent in anticipation of what was going to happen to this man, but Alan Mulally did the last thing his team expected. He began to clap, and he praised this man for his boldness and honesty, and they worked to address the problems. The man who stood up and owned his problem was Mark Fields, who succeeded Alan as the CEO of Ford<sup>1,2</sup>.

Many of us know how the story ended with Ford. They turned around dramatically and became very profitable, being the only major American car company who didn't accept a government bailout. This is a great example to illustrate how quickly team (and organizational) performance can turn around in a culture of personal accountability. Here are three ways that you can encourage this in your organization:

1. **Incentivize doing the right thing.** In the example above, Alan Mulally made it clear that he valued honesty over appearances and that fear only held people back from success. He applauded Mark Fields' openness and used it as a rudder to turn the whole ship around. He broke down traditional organizational silos and

encouraged people to collaborate across the organization. Alan understood how he wanted the organization to behave, and he incentivized people who held themselves accountable and took personal ownership of problems (and solutions).

2. **Hire the right people.** The traditional approach to hiring has been to look at a person's credentials and experience. If they checked the technical expertise boxes that the job required, then they were considered a strong candidate. Fortunately, the human resource field has become very aware over the past decade or so that technical expertise is only a small percentage of what contributes to a person's success on the job. Hire people who hold themselves to high standards and are willing to take personal accountability for their efforts. Look for a good fit with company values and overall fit with the team. It is much easier to hire someone who fits the culture than try to change them once they are on the job.
3. **Create buy-in to the team and mission.** No matter how mundane a job is, it ties in to some greater mission. Great leaders are able to articulate this mission in a way that is meaningful to each member of the team. Not only should the team believe in the mission, but they should believe in each other. Work to create strong bonds and collaboration between the team members. The more the people believe in each other, the harder they'll work to not let each other down. When people are bought in, they hold themselves to much higher standards.

Personal accountability is all about holding yourself to a high standard, taking ownership of success (and failure) and doggedly working toward team success. This is the hallmark of high performance teams, and it is well within your reach – because personal accountability always starts with you. I'm interested in hearing your techniques for creating an effective culture of personal accountability in your organization. Please let us know on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#), and share this post with others who might find it helpful.

Sources:

<sup>1</sup> American Icon: Alan Mulally and the Fight to Save Ford Motor Company by Bryce G. Hoffman

<sup>2</sup> <http://views.washingtonpost.com/leadership/panelists/2010/03/transcript-ford-ceo-on-accountability.html>