

INVEST YOUR HEARTBEATS WISELY

Practical, Philosophical, and Principled
Leadership Concepts for Business and Life

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CHAPTER 4

CREATING A CORPORATE CULTURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

*“As iron sharpens iron, so one
person sharpens another.”*

—PROVERBS 27:17

A business plan on a shelf doesn't bring a business to life. Putting that plan into action requires that people—yourself included—be held accountable for getting things done. You must take action and encourage your team to do the same. Give people responsibility for sections of that plan and charge them with taking action on those areas so that the business will become a thriving entity. People who are accountable for the

good of the company are essential. At the top of that list, you, the leader, must be accountable to your team, to your customers, and to yourself.

Were we sitting across from one another in a conference room right now, you might be tempted to ask me, “What does Christianity have to do with business? How could it possibly help me earn more money or secure better staff?” Having a set of core values, of beliefs that you live your life and run your company by, is evident to the people you work with. You will attract employees with strong values, and your customers will see it as well.

As a Christian, I try to live my life and conduct myself according to biblical principles. If you’re not a person of faith, you may, at this very point, be tempted to stop reading. But I urge you to continue, because—regardless of our differences—we can still learn a lot from people of different faiths and philosophies. I run my companies based on biblical principles, but that doesn’t mean everyone has to be Christian, only that I root my business (and life) philosophy in Christian teachings.

I was taught responsibility at a young age. I was fortunate growing up, but I also learned that money doesn’t grow on trees. I was exposed to classic manners and upbringing, and those lessons taught me many of life’s values, including how utilizing manners truly shows respect for others. At the same time, I was really grounded in faith and how you should treat the resources you are blessed with. I think that’s had a huge impact on my life overall and how I approach running a business.

For instance, I trace core values such as integrity back to Proverbs. The Bible offers guidelines for moral living that can be applied to business as well. These values are integral to me, and I make them the core of my businesses, wholly connected to our corporate culture.

It is very important that people understand why your company exists. Even though my most successful company is in heating, ventilation, air conditioning, and refrigeration (HVACR or HVAC), if you ask me what business it is, I'd say we're in the hospitality business. We're here to make people feel comfortable, which means that customers need to feel comfortable with our people—that we're truthful, that we respect property, and so on. For example, when you go to a hotel for a weekend, they are there to make you feel comfortable. You should be happy with their policies and the way they treat you. You can't bring your AC system to our shop. We have to go to your house, and that means we have to show you our hospitality in your own home.

Romans 12:13 speaks to this principle: "Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality." People call us when they are in need. We have a responsibility to treat them with hospitality in all phases of our interaction with them.

My great-grandmother, who was a teacher, would give you a *C* for doing nothing above and beyond the task at hand. Today, people's expectations are so low that they hand out an *A* if you do the bare minimum. My company has received so many compliments just for doing what we were hired to do.

The funniest compliment we ever got was when our technicians did such a great job cleaning up their work area that the homeowner said she had to clean up her condo just to match the good job they had done.

Because we created a culture in which doing the job—and doing it well—is the norm, that is what our technicians expect and what they communicate to our customers. Through their personal integrity, which is supported by the company’s culture, our techs hold themselves accountable to completing their work beyond what customers usually expect.

As for leadership, I’ve always been very intentional in letting the other leaders in my business know they are on stage. They are example setters, as am I. How I live my life outside this company is how I live my life inside this company. It’s not like Friday at 5:00 p.m. comes around and it’s time to change into a different person for the weekend. I have a lot of fun and enjoy my life, but I want to earn the respect of my team, and that means behaving in a respectful manner in my personal life. Nothing erodes respect and corporate culture more than a leader who does not lead by example all the time.

*An organization is only as good as the
employees and leaders within it.*

I enjoy writing positive notes for my team as a motivational tool. In writing one of these notes, I found this acronym, credited to the school system in Fort Meade, Florida: PRIDE stands

for *personal responsibility in daily execution*. All people must be personally accountable for what they do each and every day, because an organization is only as good as the employees and leaders within it. When an organization is led properly, each person within it is crucial to the success of the company. The lack of accountability—for both employees and the leadership—is a weak link; it will cause the chain to break.

Making mistakes

When you make a mistake, admit it and move on. Own it. Do something different. If you can't admit a mistake, you will wallow in those mistakes—that's your pride keeping you from success.

What's wrong with saying, "This decision didn't work out, so we're revamping"? People respect this kind of honesty. They'll see that you're smart enough to recognize when something isn't working and confident enough to try a new path. They do not respect people who, to the end, say they were right even when they were wrong.

A few years ago, I had an idea for an ad campaign that involved targeting an audience we typically didn't focus on. It required new ads—about \$40,000 in added budget expense—and needed a number of departments to participate in the execution of the plan. My team was spot-on and did as I asked, followed my lead. But the plan was a complete failure and didn't generate any revenue to speak of after the four- or five-month campaign. I had to declare the project a

failure in concept, and because I had the idea, was responsible for the overall marketing plan, and controlled the expenses associated with it, I had to own it. I could have blamed it on the staff, but that would have been a lie. I'm responsible. I'm accountable. The team immediately rallied, and we moved on to a new strategy.

This trait is applicable in business as well as with family. People make mistakes. Leaders make mistakes. All people want to hear when someone makes a mistake is "I'm sorry; I messed up. It's my fault, but here's an idea to fix it." Most people will forgive and move on. Humility goes a long way in the eyes of both employees and family. Humility and humbleness do not equate to being a doormat; in fact, they are a sign of strength and confidence. Never being able to admit you were wrong builds an impenetrable wall around you, and people lose respect quickly. Honesty is the best policy.

Communicating corporate culture

There is a culture within every company. It is up to you, as the leader, to make that culture intentional and to decide what culture you want it to be and how you communicate it to the whole organization. You can do this through repetition: It's all about speaking and repeating. Leaders should also show their hospitality within the company. After all, this is where your internal customers—your employees—live. The culture begins and ends with you.

One of the most important things a leader can instill in people is the knowledge of how important the *execution* of a plan is, rather than just the plan itself. You can read this book and think, *Wow! There are a lot of good ideas here*, but if you never take the steps to put something into action, it won't help you make changes in your business or implement practices for success. In a business, whatever the goal or mission is, you have to map out a plan and get people excited about embarking on that plan.

Why is a corporate culture based on values important? People in an organization need structure, or else they will try to implement it themselves. Your staff needs to have boundaries to work within. Companies can be nimble—reactive to the marketplace and able to make adjustments where needed—but that does not mean all team members run in their own direction. There must be an overriding plan through which the leadership points all its staff members toward the same goals. This should be the case regardless of how many departments you have in your company. Define those goals and take aim for cohesiveness. This doesn't mean there can't be teams or people who are creative or outgoing, doing new and innovative things, but, like you, they must serve the good of the company. Everyone must be accountable.

Are you and your team members working for the good of the company? Here are a few questions that might help you determine your answer:

- Being accountable comes from setting expectations on the front end. Are you making sure your staff understands their roles?
- Are you measuring progress along the way?
- Is your team hitting the targets they are supposed to hit?
- Are you holding reeducation meetings to make sure everyone understands timelines, consequences, and how to minimize negative outcomes?

Review this checklist with your team and ask yourselves, *Am I holding myself accountable?*

Leadership Heartbeats

- Be accountable to your team, to your customers, and to yourself.
- Hold your team members accountable, and make sure they hold themselves accountable too.
- Practice PRIDE: Personal responsibility in daily execution.
- Own your mistakes, apologize, and move forward.
- Build a plan, and then execute it.
- Define your company goals and aim for cohesiveness among all team members to reach those goals.