



Activate a Culture
of Accountability to
Drive Business Results



Every organization wants employees who step up, take initiative, and deliver results.

However, it's often easier to find examples of lack of accountability in today's corporate environments, with the stress of shareholder and stakeholder expectations and cutthroat competition.

Take, for example, Boeing.

Following a door-plug blowout on an Alaska Airlines flight in January 2024, significant scrutiny was placed on Boeing's safety practices and quality control. Whistleblowers and subsequent inspections revealed ongoing manufacturing issues, including missing bolts and rushed inspections, pointing to a "profit-over-safety culture" within the company.

While then-CEO announced his resignation in early 2024, along with other top executives, the initial responses were criticized for a lack of transparency and an inadequate communication strategy. The ongoing public inquiry into the quality control issues highlights the perception that certain high-level individuals were not taking sufficient personal responsibility for the systemic failures that put passenger safety at risk, instead engaging in a cycle of blame.

But true accountability isn't about blame or failure. It is about empowering employees to find a solution at hand, to choose to own the process ... and the result.



46% of employees

look to company leaders as role models for positive cultural habits like building respect and making ethical decisions, yet **only 25% say management meets their expectations.**



In today's rapidly evolving business landscape, accountability has never been more crucial. As technological advancements put increased pressure on the speed of delivery and reshape the way businesses operate, the cost of failure is high. To keep up, leaders must develop a workforce that can mobilize, adapt, and grow together.

Confronting the Myths Sustaining Low-Accountability Cultures

It's not that people don't value accountability—it's that most believe in accountability for everyone but themselves. In most organizations, **80% of employees acknowledge the need for more accountability**. But less than 10% of those same individuals see how they are contributing to the accountability gap (and many leaders fail to recognize their own role in fostering it). So why does a lack of accountability continue to wreak havoc on organizations across all industries, even when it's identified as a pervasive issue?

Myth #1:

Accountability only shows up when things go wrong, and it drags morale down.

Reality:

When people experience accountability as empowering—not punishing—morale rises and teams step up.

It's no wonder people aren't stepping up to model accountability. In most companies, "accountability" is treated as a punitive word—something leaders demand when things go wrong. This negative perception is the first obstacle to developing an accountable workforce.

Rather than own their own growth, employees opt for self-preservation: shrinking back, shifting blame, making excuses, waiting to be told what to do, and staying silent until everyday problems snowball into catastrophic failures.

Myth #2:

Cleaning up what's broken is easier than fixing it.

Reality:

When you address the root cause of known “breaking points,” you build ownership and prevent the same breakdowns from repeating.

Most leaders are exhausted from the burden of cleaning up messes left in the wake of no-to-low-accountability behaviors.

The truth is, when leaders get pulled into tactical firefighting, everyone suffers. Strategic thinking takes a backseat to conflict resolution, employees feel disempowered, and innovation stalls.

These myths don't just live in people's heads—they show up in daily operations. Over time, they harden into systemic obstacles that prevent accountability from taking root.

Warning: *While it may be a natural leadership instinct to step in when things go awry, this approach can actually widen an organization's accountability gap by validating the belief that “someone else will take care of it” when individuals don't step up and take accountability.*

The costs of this vicious cycle are high.

Hidden costs:

(Don't show up on a spreadsheet)

- ✘ Low engagement
- ✘ Poor decision-making
- ✘ Stalled innovation
- ✘ Distracted leaders
- ✘ Weakened performance

Visible costs:

(Red-line metrics no leader can ignore)








- ✘ High turnover
- ✘ Rework
- ✘ Quality issues
- ✘ Safety risks
- ✘ Missed product launches
- ✘ Dissatisfied customers



Three Organizational Barriers to Accountability

When myths about accountability go unchallenged, they manifest in the ways organizations function. Over time, they harden into barriers that keep accountability from taking hold.

Three of the most common are:

-  **Below the Line[®] Behaviors**
 Excuses, blame, and waiting for direction become normalized. People spend more energy avoiding ownership than creating solutions.
-  **Soft Skills Gaps**
 Many times, people in leadership roles lack the know-how to coach, give feedback, or lead through change. Without these skills, employees disengage, performance falters, and burnout permeates teams.
-  **Structural Misalignment**

 Silos, lack of clarity, and weak execution discipline make collaboration difficult. Without shared goals and a common operating model, teams push in different directions and accountability breaks down.

These barriers are not unique to low-performing companies. High-performing organizations face them too—but they respond differently.



The Secret of High-Performing Organizations

High-performing organizations don't eliminate challenges — they build systems and mindsets that transform them. Their secret lies in shifting people from “Below the Line” behaviors to an “Above the Line” culture.

Where average cultures allow excuses, high-performance cultures encourage ownership.

Where employees wait for direction, they instead seek clarity and take initiative.

Where problems are denied or ignored, they are surfaced and solved.



The results of these mindset and behavioral shifts are clear.

Ownership and initiative:

Employees step up and drive outcomes.

Leadership readiness:

Leaders guide their teams through change with confidence.

High-potential development:

Rising talent is equipped for future leadership.

Collaboration and innovation:

Silos break down, decision-making improves, and innovation thrives.

The business impact of accountability means ...

▲ 18% higher productivity

▲ 23% higher profitability


▼ 21% lower turnover

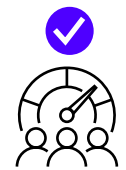


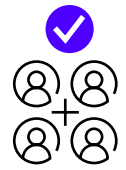
Culture of Accountability[®]

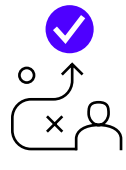
So how do organizations move from myths and barriers to the breakthrough results of high-performance cultures? By activating a Culture of Accountability. The path forward doesn't require another initiative of the month — it requires embedding accountability into the way people think, act, and lead every day.

Here are four ways organizations can activate a culture of accountability:

 **Introduce a Shared Language**
Give everyone — from executives to front-line employees — a simple definition and approachable framework to talk about accountability. A shared vocabulary helps people recognize unproductive behaviors, shift conversations toward ownership, and reinforce what it looks like to step up.

 **Equip Leaders to Walk the Talk**
Leaders set the tone. When they clearly form and communicate expectations, align their teams, and follow through with consistency, they create the conditions where accountability thrives. When leaders model ownership, their people are more likely to do the same.

 **Create Experiences That Shift Beliefs**
Employees don't change because they're told to — they change because of the experiences they have. When leaders recognize initiative, encourage open dialogue, and create safe spaces for problem-solving, they shape beliefs that drive stronger actions and results.

 **Embed Accountability into Daily Execution**
Accountability can't live in a binder or a workshop — it has to be woven into the way work gets done. Organizations that build clear expectations, shorten problem-solving cycles, and connect daily actions to larger outcomes see faster execution, stronger collaboration, and more innovation.



From Awareness to Action

High-performance cultures don't happen by accident. They are built by leaders who understand that accountability is not punishment, but empowerment. When people at every level own their role, organizations unlock resilience, innovation, and growth.

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**Brinker
Bounces Back**



[Read Case Study >>](#)

**Petronas
Powers Through**



PETRONAS

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