

## Stop The Organizational Hemorrhaging

### Accountability Is The Life's Blood Of Your Organization

By Kendall C. Wright, President of Entelechy Training and Development, Inc.

Just to hear the term "hemorrhage" surely conjures up a sense of urgency and a call to action, rightfully so. This sense of urgency shouldn't be restricted to medical circumstances. Many organizations are "hemorrhaging," thereby rendering their human capital anemic and weak. This is a call to action! Stop the organizational hemorrhaging.

The recent census indicates that in the U.S. today, there are literally millions, if not tens of millions, of individuals in leadership roles. What we can't get from that data, is the actual number of these leaders who are woefully inept at delivering messages of accountability.

The unwillingness or inability of the leadership to proactively intervene and engage in constructive conversation is no small matter. The bottom line impact of this ineptitude is an underdevelopment and an underutilization of human resources. Said in other words, by not offering timely and objective feedback to employees and co-workers, leaders are engaging in a practice analogous to the archaic ritual of bloodletting. In the meantime, organizations are hemorrhaging their life's blood - profitability, effectiveness, and efficiency.

While some "experts" may wish to debate whether the problem is epidemic or pandemic, the truth remains; delivering messages of accountability is a serious skill deficiency for many leaders.

In a WebMD article, Tina Tessina, PhD, a licensed psychotherapist in Southern California, defined a phobia as, "an exaggerated anxiety." During my consulting career, I have noticed a consistent pattern of anxiety, reticence, and procrastination when it comes to holding others accountable for inappropriate behavior and subpar performance. I have since labeled this phenomenon as "Accountability Phobia."

Let me be the first to concede that some of this fear is rooted in some pretty scary experiences in which the leader's intent may have been positive, but the outcome was a nightmare. As is true in overcoming other "phobias," the key is in understanding the source of the fear, confronting the fear, and limiting the expectation of the worse case scenario as an inevitable conclusion.

During our Actualizing Accountability workshops, I've helped many managers, leaders, and supervisors become more comfortable in delivering feedback and increasing the quality of their work relationships by following a few simple guidelines:

1. **Be objective** – reserve judgment about the motives of the other party. To imply motive is to contaminate the conversation. The issue is not about the motive, instead, focus on how the actions met, exceeded, or fell short of expectations.
2. **Be specific** – identify the specific behavior(s) that convinced you it was time to have this conversation. Make sure the behavior is something the receiver has control over and could modify if he/she desired to do so.

3. **Be personal** – share the factual and the emotional impact of the undesired behavior. Help the receiver to understand what hardship the behavior has created for the team and/or to the working relationship.
4. **Be solution-focused** – be sure the solution is understood and agreed upon by each party. Use of active listening techniques, such as paraphrasing and open ended questioning, will help ensure clarity and compliance.

Follow these basic points as you offer feedback to others and you'll be on your way to nursing your organizational culture back to health. Just as the doctors and nurses keep a watchful eye on a patient's vitals, leaders have to be equally as watchful for signs of accountability anemia. At the first hint of trouble, put the "phobia" behind you and address the problem – with a sense of urgency. Never forget: Accountability is the life's blood of your organization.

**Leadership Lesson:** Stop the organizational hemorrhaging! The human body can endure the loss of no more than 40% of its total blood volume, exceed that point and death is imminent. Similarly, an organization can't hope for a promising prognosis when an overwhelming majority of its leaders chose not to address the severed arteries and puncture wounds better known as poor performance and inappropriate behavior. Organizations hemorrhage talent, productivity, and profitability when leaders are reluctant or even just outright refuse to initiate timely accountability conversations.

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