



Get Off the Couch!

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Almost everyone has experienced collapsing from exhaustion on their metaphorical “couch”

after repeated attempts to solve a problem that feels out of their control—a problem that is preventing their ability to move forward and be successful.

Yeah Samake, mayor of the small town of Ouélessébougou, hit the reality of his own couch when a military coup occurred just prior to presidential elections in his country.

On March 22, 2012, the Malian army stormed the presidential palace, overthrowing the western African country’s twenty-year-old democracy. In the turmoil Islamic militants took control of two-thirds of the country and crushed Mali’s democratic elections. “It was a tragic moment when the coup happened,” says Yeah Samake, just forty miles from the chaos. “I came into my living room and completely collapsed on the couch. [Then] my wife came and kicked me. I couldn’t believe it. I told her, ‘I am looking for sympathy here. Why are you kicking me?’ She only said, ‘Get out there and go do something.’”

Mayor Samake, couldn't initially imagine how he would attack solving this problem. Instead, he did what comes natural to everyone when presented with really challenging circumstances that seem out of their control, he fell Below The Line, victimized by his circumstances. The kick in the pants to get Above the Line came with the admonition to get off the couch and do something!

In our book, *The Wisdom of Oz*, we introduce a model of personal accountability that has a powerful impact on personal success. The model shows that there is a line that divides accountable behaviors and attitudes from non-accountable approaches. Living Above The Line brings success and progress. Dropping Below The Line brings frustration and disappointment. It's not wrong to go Below The Line, its just human nature; and its also not effective. Above The Line are the four Steps To Accountability: See It, Own It, Solve It, and Do It.

Whether you get off the couch on your own or require a little nudge from somewhere else, the point is to not be victimized by your circumstances, but to take accountability for your circumstances and get out there and go do something. Mayor Samake's wife's feedback helped him take that first, all important step Above The Line and See It. That feedback gave him the resolve to get off the couch, get in the car, and drive through five rebel checkpoints into the heart of chaos. He soon found himself "in this military barrack with hundreds of nervous soldiers with guns."

Mayor Samake's desire for a better life for his people emboldened him and propelled him through the troops to the coup leader, who demanded to know why he was there. Samake told him, "I have come to tell you that power does not belong in the hands of the military."

Impressed by his courage, the rebel leader, Captain Amadou Sanogo, invited Mayor Samake to speak to the Malian people on national television. Samake later did just that, denouncing the coup and demanding that power be restored to the people. Speaking from his heart, he added, "Change does not come from outside. It should come from within." Yeah Samake went on to become the democratic voice of his nation and made a real difference in the reinstatement of Mali's democratic presidential elections.

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Seeing It has More to do With Your Eyes Than Your Ears

So, if a little unsolicited feedback got Samake to do the heroic, why don't we naturally see the benefits of feedback? Why don't we explore our own blind spots more often than we do? Most of us think we are generally right about things. We see the world through our own lens and what we see is "the way it is." As Mark Twain reportedly said, "It's not what you don't know that gets you into trouble, it's what you know for sure that just ain't so."

The modern-day version of Twain's insight can be found in a line from the film *Men in Black*, when Tommy Lee Jones' Agent K, speaking about aliens living among us, says, "Fifteen hundred years ago everybody knew the earth was the center of the universe. Five hundred years ago everybody knew the earth was flat. And fifteen minutes ago you knew that humans were alone on this planet."

Because we all hold on pretty tight to what we know, even if it ain't so, we tend to push back on the notion of feedback—solicited or not. How do you work up the courage to admit your reality may not actually be the reality and seek out the opinions of others? As with everything related to change, it all starts with making a personal choice—taking accountability for seeing things as they really are.

Partners In Leadership recently released a multi-year “Workplace Accountability Study” that indicates 78% of people in your company, church, school, family, team, community group, or government are living in a vacuum. According to the study’s 40,000 respondents, over three-fourths of us are seen as doing our own thing—winging it on only two data points... our own two eyeballs. The trick is to recognize that you can’t survive, let alone thrive, on a single set of eyes.

Assuming that at this point we’ve convinced you that feedback can contribute to your and others’ success, it’s important to realize that the best way to get feedback is to ask for it. It’s not really more complicated than that. Simply ask: “What feedback do you have for me?” You can tailor your question to the situation; for example, “What feedback do you have for me on how I can be a better _____ (leader, team member, employee, husband, wife, partner, friend, etc.)?” However, just because asking for feedback is not complicated, doesn’t mean it’s easy.

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9 Tips to See It

Before you gather your team or blindly start asking what others think of you, consider these 9 proven tips that will help you get your head right—allowing you to effectively solicit, respond to, and use feedback to succeed in business and personal life.

- 1. Go after it.** Feedback doesn't just magically happen with the wave of a wand. You have to be proactive and make it happen. Stay connected with customers or prospects by seeking feedback even when you believe things are going great—especially when you think it's going great—sometimes what you think is happening isn't what is actually happening.
- 2. Have courage.** Seeking constructive feedback can be scary. Remember, whoever you're asking feedback from is already thinking about you and your performance anyway; you're just finally hearing what they already believe.
- 3. Welcome awkwardness.** Remember that almost everyone fears offering feedback about as much as they fear asking for it. People worry it will backfire, and they value their job or relationship over saying anything—which is why momentum stalls in the first place. Revel in the discomfort and seek feedback anyway.

4. **Be convincing.** Assure your audience, customers, even your employees, that you really do want to know what they think. They need to know there won't be any blowback from you if they honestly tell you how they see it.
5. **Get positive.** Though it might be hard to believe, it's easier for people to offer positive rather than negative feedback. You have to ask for constructive feedback. Try "What can we do better?" instead of "What are we doing wrong?"
6. **Listen.** After asking for feedback, you need to do the hard part. Listening can be difficult, but it is one of the most meaningful steps of exchanging feedback, and it is important that you listen to everything. Then act on what you hear that makes sense.

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7. **Be grateful.** Don't let constructive feedback, no matter how unpleasant, skew your view of the person who's giving valuable input. Remember: their insight could help improve performance or efficiency. Express sincere gratitude for their willingness to share in the first place. Gratitude will signal that you are not defensive (even if you are) and that you are happy they took the time to share.
8. **Make it a habit.** Make getting feedback a habit, not a one-time thing. Ask if it's okay to follow up, even suggesting you meet again for a reality check just to keep yourself in line.
9. **Be nice.** Finally, be nice to yourself and others. You can't make any important changes overnight.

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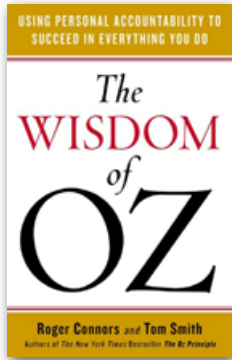
Stepping It Up

The first step in improving any situation—whether personal or professional—is to See It by acknowledging the reality of the situation you are in. This often involves a willingness to hear the hard things and usually only comes with a sufficient level of humility, gratitude, openness, honesty, patience with self, and a desire for better results. Mayor Samake did it and he achieved great things by responding to feedback.

When you make the choice to control your circumstances and not let them control you, you also make the choice to apply the power of personal accountability to overcoming those unfavorable circumstances and changing the outcomes you otherwise would experience.

That path includes taking the powerful steps to See It, Own It, Solve It and Do It. Powerful, positive steps that will yield results that will undoubtedly lead to success in your career, or that can even lead to impacting an entire nation. 🇺🇸

Info



BUY THE BOOK | Get more details or buy a copy of [The Wisdom of Oz](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Roger Connors and Thomas Smith are the cofounders of Partners In Leadership and are four-time New York Times bestselling authors. Recognized as the worldwide experts in workplace accountability, they have compiled the most extensive body of knowledge on the topic. The authors bring deep understanding and decades of real world success to help management teams facilitate large-scale cultural transition through the proven Partners In Leadership methodologies and models.

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