



It's Time to Fix It!

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Accountability in business today is broken, and that translates into negative impact on your desired results.

Our three decades of work in the field of accountability connects the dots between the misfire on workplace accountability and the anemic levels of employee engagement. Recent studies have shown that there is a massive decline in employee engagement, reflecting an overall lack of commitment on the part of both employees and employers.

Built on the foundation of our extensive Workplace Accountability Study of more than forty thousand working professionals, our new book, *Fix It: Getting Accountability Right*, lays out four Steps To Accountability, then go deeper into the 16 Accountability Traits that the most successful individuals, teams, and companies practice every day—traits that have emerged in our work with millions of people worldwide.

The 16 Accountability Traits

SEE IT: Acknowledging reality and seeing things as they really are
<ul style="list-style-type: none">① Obtaining the Perspectives of Others② Communicating Openly and Candidly③ Asking for and Offering Feedback④ Hearing and Saying the Hard Things to See Reality
OWN IT: Connecting past efforts with what we are going to do to achieve what we want
<ul style="list-style-type: none">⑤ Being Personally Invested⑥ Learning from Both Successes and Failures⑦ Ensuring My Work Is Aligned with Key Results⑧ Acting on the Feedback I (We) Receive
SOLVE IT: Tackling real problems and removing true obstacles on your road to results
<ul style="list-style-type: none">⑨ Constantly Asking “What Else Can I (We) Do?”⑩ Collaborating Across Functional Boundaries⑪ Creatively Dealing with Obstacles⑫ Taking the Necessary Risks
DO IT: Taking accountability to make things happen and get things done
<ul style="list-style-type: none">⑬ Doing the Things I (We) Say I (We) Will Do⑭ Staying “Above The Line” by Not Blaming Others⑮ Tracking Progress with Proactive and Transparent Reporting⑯ Building an Environment of Trust

We encourage you to take a look at all 16 Accountability Traits. When reading through these, put any new endeavor up against this list and you will see just how important it will be to effectively use as many traits as possible in the execution of your plan.

But, in this piece, we’d like to explore two of the sixteen that have had immediate and extremely beneficial results for organizations that excel at demonstrating them—and are more connected than they may appear to be at first glance—**Communicating Openly and Candidly**, and **Taking the Necessary Risks**.

Communicating Openly and Candidly

Speaking Right Speaks to Success

Beginning with *Toy Story* in 1995, all Pixar films released to date have achieved critical and/or immense financial success, earning the studio nearly \$10 billion worldwide and averaging more than \$600 million per film. *Finding Nemo* and *Toy Story 3* still rank among the fifty highest-grossing films of all time. The studio has earned 12 Academy Awards, seven Golden Globes, and eleven Grammys and counting. In a business where the vast majority of films flop, how has Pixar been so consistently profitable?

Ed Catmull, cofounder of Pixar, writes in his book *Creativity, Inc.*, “A hallmark of a healthy creative culture is that its people feel free to share ideas, opinions, and criticisms ... Candor is the key to collaborating effectively.” Pixar’s creative success lies in what they call the “Braintrust.” According to Catmull, the Braintrust can be as large as twenty people at a table, with fifteen more in chairs around the walls, involving writers, heads of story, directors—those involved in the film and who have a knack for storytelling. “Its premise is simple: Put smart, passionate people in a room together, charge them with identifying and solving problems, and encourage them to be candid.”

Each participant will often load up a plate of food, then everyone sits, digs into lunch, and into storytelling. The back-and-forth and give-and-take eventually leads the group to a solution each individual never would have found on their own. Catmull goes on to say that, “You don’t want to be at a company where there is more candor in the hallways than in the rooms where fundamental ideas or policy are being hashed out. Seek out people who are willing to level with you, and ... hold them close.”

It shouldn’t surprise anyone to know that dealing openly and candidly with others is a business necessity. Being open and candid:

- Saves time.
- Helps everyone see the reality of the situation.
- Speeds up solutions.
- Eliminates guesswork.
- Helps people know where they stand.
- And helps you make really great films—or whatever it is you do.

Despite this, our research clearly shows that only about one in four people believes he or she, or anyone in their organization, consistently and clearly says what they think—only 25 percent! Saying what you really think means to share your untarnished, smartly expressed opinions. In the training and consulting work we do, we refer to this kind of candidness as being willing to “speak right”: to speak up at the right time with the right people in the right way. Learning to speak right yourself and insisting on it from others is a sure way to fix it!

Being Open and Candid Is a Choice

Now you may be thinking that your ability to be open and candid isn't really a choice but a function of interacting with those people with which you happen to find yourself. Though there certainly are some circumstances that are harder to deal with than others—we've all been there—your ability to be open and candid in any circumstance is still a matter of choice.

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And the payoff? When you make that choice, you get things moving and gain the reputation as being authentic, nonpolitical, and effective.

We understand that not everyone will see being open and candid as the right way to operate, as many have learned that the so-called smart way or “the way things are done around here” is to be cautious and manage any risk that may pop up by closely guarding what you really think. But that’s not accountability. And it’s not effective.

For a little help with being open and candid, let’s take a look at what one executive does— a COO for a professional shared workplace company. This COO told us that she likes to engage in a little pre-meeting prep, especially if she’s going to be exploring something controversial, transformational, or anything involving significant change. Well ahead of the actual meeting, she will float a draft or an agenda to key people, letting them see what she’s thinking. Even more helpful, she will often go directly to anyone she believes will offer the most resistance. She airs her concerns and allows them to candidly air theirs. Rather than dropping the bomb in a larger group session only to see the discussion go sideways, she uses the pre-meeting preparation to build advocacy and support. Doing so allows for a more positive, candid conversation because key players already know what’s coming.

This kind of practice will aid you when the norm is anything but candid and open. This is reflected in our study where 58 percent of the respondents said “yes” when asked: “Have you ever seen a problem developing in your organization but did nothing about it?” In other words, nearly six out of ten of those sitting in that meeting with you could have helped out just by saying something. Our recommendation: act like it’s your own company and speak up! Of course, if your workplace doesn’t value this kind of transparency, then you must find ways to share your views that are strategically smart:

In the end, being open and candid is always better than letting truth languish in the shadows.

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Taking the Necessary Risks

Rock the Boat!

To further demonstrate the validity of our 16 Accountability Traits and how they show up in any successful company, let's take a look at the trait: Taking the Necessary Risks.

Risk takers disrupt; they rock the boat, shake things up, and make an intentional break from the way people are used to doing things. In fact, risk taking really implies that someone is being a bit inventive, creative, and thinking out-of-the-box to overcome challenges and make things happen. Of course, the objective isn't just to take risks; it's to get results, but that often can't happen unless you are willing to place your bets on different strategies and tactics, understanding that the chance of failure is always lurking.

That often means trying something new that might fail in order to bring about something you really want, a result you could obtain in no other way. Above all, risk taking should remain true to the one real purpose in business: achieving results.

It's easy to see risk taking in entrepreneurs who disrupt entire marketplaces. Let's take a quick look at Oakley, Inc., founded in a garage by Jim Jannard with just three hundred dollars. Jim is known today in his organization as someone who is "disruptive by design."

Though at the time he launched his business many manufacturers were serving the motorcycle-motocross circuit, Mr. Jannard took a risk and turned the market upside down with an innovative idea. Jim had noticed a feature on the typical motorcycle that most overlooked: the handgrip. In his home garage lab, the budding entrepreneur invented his first disruptive product, a unique bike handgrip made from a new material with a distinctive shape and feel.

Soon after, he began selling his revolutionary handgrips from his car trunk at motocross events, and when the pros quickly took notice, Oakley was born.

Jim's next break-through arrived in the form of the O-Frame goggle. Now, sunglasses have been around forever, so why bother to think differently about them? Jim's answer was to give riders clearer lenses and a wider peripheral view. Oakley's Eyeshades started a revolution in eyewear, moving sunglasses from a mere afterthought accessory to a piece of equipment every biker suddenly seemed to need.

The reward for all the risk and disruption? To date, Oakley has won more than one thousand design and utility patents worldwide, and the company has become a household name, with its

sunglasses worn by some of the world's greatest athletes. To top it off, a few years ago Oakley was acquired by Luxottica for more than \$2 billion, all made possible by a risk-taking, disruptive guy who started a business in his garage and wasn't afraid to rock the boat.

Find the Courage to Take a Risk

Which concerns you more: the risk imposed by change and innovation or the risk inherent in hunkering down, doing nothing, and playing it safe? In our study, we asked, "Once someone has decided to change, the biggest problem is . . . ?"

- 81 percent said they didn't follow through on the change.
- 19 percent said they resisted other people changing.

Why don't people follow through? Why do they resist change in others? It's usually a lack of confidence or a loss of nerve. We have found that:

- Taking the necessary risks requires courage.
- Courage comes from believing that you are right.

So why don't people follow through with changes they already decided to make? Either they don't believe that the change is really right, or they lack the courage to face the challenges that will come with the change as they work to make it happen.

What does taking the necessary risks look like? Where and when should you start taking them? Ask yourself each of the below questions, then picture what the result would be if you showed the courage to take these risks:

- How would taking the necessary risks impact you personally?
- What would it look like for you at your next meeting?
- At your company, do you fear you're taking a risk when you speak your mind, even if you feel you are right? What would happen if you started speaking up?
- Do you feel like others would support you if you took a risk? There are more people out there that might not be speaking up, but are waiting for someone else to show the way.
- And what about the values of your organization? Do you see opportunities to change them for the better?

Most organizational values include some form of honesty, integrity, and focus on the customer. But does your company say one thing and support another? We often hear people say something like, “Yeah, it says that on the wall, but that’s not how it works around here.” Do you feel like it’s too risky to stand up for a corporate objective or value in the face of daily experiences that say otherwise? If so, where do you get the courage?

We all know that for a company to stay in business, taking risks is necessary. Enacting any change involves risk. But when it’s my risk, my job, or my reputation, it can be intimidating, even immobilizing.

We love these insightful words that are often attributed in one form or another to one of America’s most quoted writers of inspirational maxims, William Arthur Ward: “risks must be taken ... the person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing, and is nothing ... he cannot learn, feel, change, grow or live ... only a person who risks is free.”

Taking the necessary risk is an essential fix to accountability. It’s inescapable. At some point, the accountable person will feel compelled to step out, be disruptive, and put it all on the line in order to get results. So do what it takes to feel right about the decision or idea, and take the step.

Fix It with the Right Tool for the Right Job

We've taken the opportunity here to introduce you to two of our 16 Accountability Traits. Trait 2: Being Open and Candid and Trait 12: Taking the Necessary Risks. Even though they are ten traits apart, they overlap and intermingle? It's hard to speak openly and candidly if you don't take risks. It's hard to take risks if you aren't willing to speak openly and candidly.

One company we worked with shared a story about a time in the organization when accountability wasn't being demonstrated properly. This organization decided they needed feedback from various teams, so sent out a confidential survey asking people "to be candid, even blatantly honest." Because a marketing team knew they had each other's backs and were in this together, they decided to follow the "blatantly honest" invitation. Comments came from the team like:

- "This is the worst work experience of my life."
- "Ron (the manager) lies to me consistently, even fabricates expense reports."
- "Our team makes money in spite of him."
- "I honestly think Ron is using crack or something."

Everyone had summoned the courage to be open and candid, held their breath, and waited. Then the worst possible thing that could happen did—nothing. No acknowledgement of their courageous attempts and candidness. No closing of the communication loop. No action at all, despite taking the big risk in being “blatantly honest.”

It wasn't until a team meeting weeks later that Manager Ron shocked everyone by mocking and joking that, “I must be a liar; I'm on crack or something.” His comments made it clear that the senior management had shared everything with Ron from the supposed “confidential” surveys.

How accountable was this company's leadership team to its employees when they intimately shared their honest feedback? Were they following up with those who actually offered the feedback? Will these people ever offer feedback again?

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Contrast the above with what Brad Lee, CEO of Breg, Inc., a large health care appliance manufacturer, shared with us. “It’s important to realize what a gift feedback is and treat it like that. I never ever blow anyone up for telling me truly bad news. I try to categorize bad news and good news as ‘just news’ and never ever shoot the messenger. This attitude keeps the feedback channels open and the information flowing.”

When you get accountability right, everything else will go right as you execute, overcome obstacles, and work to get results.

When you get accountability wrong, don’t expect anything else to go right in your job, on your team, or in the organization as a whole. Treating only the symptoms of dysfunction that stem from poor accountability practices will cause you to lose time and miss opportunities to get real traction towards the results you want.

If you want to keep spending precious time, money, resources, and emotional energy on the things that don’t produce real results, then just keep doing what you’re doing. **If you want to build a vibrant Culture of Accountability that will likely far surpass any working environments you have ever experienced, and that will rival the very best teams you have ever enjoyed, then it’s time to get accountability right—to fix it.** 📌

Info



BUY THE BOOK | Get more details or buy a copy of [Fix It](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHORS | **Roger Connors** and **Tom Smith** are cofounders of Partners In Leadership, the Accountability Training and Culture Change Company with thousands of clients all around the world. They are also the coauthors of the New York Times bestselling books *The Oz Principle*, *How Did That Happen?*, *Change the Culture*, *Change the Game*, and *The Wisdom of Oz*. **Craig Hickman**, coauthor of *The Oz Principle*, and **Tracy Skousen** and **Marcus Nicolls** are business unit presidents with Partners In Leadership.

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