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HOLDING PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE

— *for Results* —

THE POSITIVE, PRINCIPLED WAY



HOW
DID THAT HAPPEN



Roger Connors and Tom Smith

authors of *The Oz Principle* and
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“How Did That Happen?” offers another provocative segment in Connors and Smith’s series on holding people accountable for results.”

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“Creates a set of tools that enable me to . . . avoid many of the time-trodden pitfalls of other management techniques prevalent in my past practices. Thanks Roger and Tom for another outstanding management guidebook.”

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“Connors and Smith present the process any leader can follow to hold people accountable and to get their team to invest their hearts and minds.”

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“How Did That Happen?” gives leaders the much-needed ‘accountability reality check’ . . . so necessary in this time of turbulent change and economic uncertainty.”

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“How Did That Happen?” offers . . . a tool for holding others accountable in a way that allows them to be successful *and* still sleep at night. . . . *A must-read* for any leader who wants to achieve success in a sustainable way.”

Major Daniel Thompson officer in charge, EMT, 325th Combat
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“The content and the methodology of *How Did That Happen?* are aligned with delivering sustained long-term results. . . . As an educator, I find this book to be a significant addition to my library.”

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“A perfectly timed tool for everyone faced with the challenge of holding others accountable for results. Using interesting stories that will enhance your learning, the authors provide a solution for achieving results that will work in today’s challenging business environment. Put *How Did That Happen?* at the top of your reading list!”

Nick Porter, executive vice president, institutional advancement &
corporate relations, Moffitt Cancer Center

“An excellent addition to the accountability series! *How Did That Happen?* truly delivers and is full of practical tools, skills, and stories that will enable you to elevate accountability in any size organization. Well done!”

Michael J. Capaldi, associate vice president, sales training & leadership development, Sanofi-Aventis

“*How Did That Happen?* does an artful job of turning the complex task of managing people to achieve results into simple concepts and models that anyone can follow—best of all, the approach is positive and principled.”

Danny P. Harris, senior vice president and COO, OGE Energy Corp.

“An excellent resource for any manager working to build an *accountable* organization. . . . This book contains valuable insight into just how to do this!”

Scot R. Benson, vice president and general manager, MacDermid Printing Solutions

“Having read Connors and Smith’s books, attended their workshops, and put into practice their tools and techniques I can attest to the fact that what they are saying really works.”

Joe Hohner, senior vice president, chief of staff, and CIO,
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan

“*How Did That Happen?* . . . is especially timely and speaks to the important challenges and opportunities facing every business today. It is an indispensable part of every leader’s supervisory toolbox.”

Emmett Murphy, author of the *New York Times* business bestseller *Leadership IQ*

“*How Did That Happen?* offers a practical and powerful solution for creating the kind of accountability that produces true alignment and real trust, which can be the determining factor in winning or losing for any organization.”

Perry Lowe, president and CEO, AXIS Dental Corporation

“Connors and Smith make a strong case for how to hold others accountable . . . leaders should read and re-read these pages—a great handbook for those who want to make ‘holding someone accountable’ much more than a throw-off phrase.”

Eric T. Hicks, senior vice president, performance improvement, JP Morgan Chase

“Over the last few years, I have read over a hundred of the top business books. . . . I would put *How Did That Happen?* in the top five. If you depend, at least in part, upon other people to achieve results that you are held accountable to produce, then this book is a must-read.”

Mark Basil, CEO, Optimum Fitness

“This book delivers practical tools that help you assess yourself, your team, and your entire organization’s managerial practice—and it’s an enjoyable read! I am making *How Did That Happen?* mandatory for all of my management teams.”

John J. Withers, vice president, sales and marketing, critical care and vascular therapies, U.S. National Operations, Edwards Lifesciences

“A fabulous and thought-provoking work. These principles will make everyone in your organization willingly take personal responsibility for their successes, failures, and for getting the job done!”

Jason Jennings, author of *Hit the Ground Running: A Manual for New Leaders*

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Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
<i>Chapter One</i> THE OUTER RING	13
<i>Chapter Two</i> FORM EXPECTATIONS	34
<i>Chapter Three</i> COMMUNICATE EXPECTATIONS	54
<i>Chapter Four</i> ALIGN EXPECTATIONS	75
<i>Chapter Five</i> INSPECT EXPECTATIONS	97
<i>Chapter Six</i> THE INNER RING	123
<i>Chapter Seven</i> EXAMINE MOTIVATION	144
<i>Chapter Eight</i> EVALUATE TRAINING	168
<i>Chapter Nine</i> ASSESS ACCOUNTABILITY	190
<i>Chapter Ten</i> CONSIDER CULTURE	212
CONCLUSION	234
APPENDIX	241
INDEX	245

Chapter One

THE OUTER RING

THE ART OF THE SEQUENCE

Every day we see and hear examples in the business media and from our clients of circumstances that profoundly affect both individuals and entire organizations, largely because someone failed to hold someone else accountable for meeting specific expectations. Almost without fail, we can explain what happened by looking at the situation through the lens of the Outer Ring of the Accountability Sequence.

Case in point: After Hurricane Katrina killed more than twelve hundred people and devastated New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, leaving in its wake a disaster of epic proportion, most observers felt that the U.S. government handled the aftermath poorly. Its failure to provide timely relief to thousands of hurricane victims taking shelter in the Louisiana Superdome in New Orleans made headlines worldwide. The congressional investigation into what went wrong with the government's overall response to the storm reveals a great deal about how a debacle like this can happen. And it highlighted the confusion, resentment, and finger-pointing that typically ensues when people are held accountable for fulfilling expectations that were not clearly established in the first place.

In July 2004, approximately one year prior to Hurricane Katrina, state, local, and federal agencies conducted a Gulf-wide exercise called "Hurricane

Pam” designed to test their collective response to a hypothetical disaster in New Orleans that included evacuating one million people and dealing with damaged levees and the destruction of hundreds of thousands of buildings. As observers later mused, the exercise was “eerily prescient,” as it foreshadowed, to an amazing degree, what would happen when Katrina struck. Before the storm ravaged New Orleans, the Department of Homeland Security had been given responsibility for the federal National Response Plan (NRP), designed to set priorities and delegate authority among responding local, state, and federal agencies in major crises in the event of an emergency. When Katrina did strike the coast, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff named Michael Brown, then FEMA director, as the principle federal officer (PFO) for Hurricane Katrina. Chertoff called Brown his “battlefield commander on the ground.”

This delegation decision, and the accompanying unclear expectations that came with it, set off a chain reaction that became the “delegation disaster” of the decade. Chertoff, in his first appearance before a House panel investigating the calamity, commented, “I knew I became more involved in operational matters than I would normally expect to be or want to be. . . . I am not a hurricane expert. I’ve got to rely on people to execute the details of the plan.” How had Katrina overwhelmed his organization? As Chertoff explained it, confusion over roles and decision-making, combined with conflicting information and reports of what was happening on the ground, left him and his team unable to deliver, despite the vast amount of state and federal resources available to his department for solving the problems they faced.

In retrospect, there were a number of clearly recognizable signs, evident from the early hours of the tragedy, that expectations would go unmet. Brown, as the House and Senate report points out, resented his appointment as PFO by his boss, Chertoff, and did not trust the secretary. The secretary did not appoint Brown until some thirty-six hours after Katrina’s landfall, despite pre-storm video briefings by the National Weather Service (which, by the way, erred by only slightly in its predictions of where, when, and with what strength Katrina would make landfall) and without regard to the preestablished procedure of appointing the PFO forty-eight hours prior to landfall. In addition, since FEMA was not a first responder organization for large-scale emergencies, the agency had not organized and equipped itself to perform the many duties required by such a monumental disaster—FEMA employs a mere twenty-six hundred people nationwide. Instead of focusing on the immediate challenge, the Secretary attended a conference on the bird flu in Atlanta the day after the hurricane struck land. As a

result, the government mounted what the House report called a Category One response to a Category Five event. Secretary Chertoff ultimately came under intense pressure to remove Michael Brown as PFO and assign that role to someone else. In the end, Brown resigned his post as FEMA director, and the House and Senate launched investigations into what went wrong.

Where did Secretary Chertoff go wrong? A thorough review of his actions with respect to the Outer Ring of the Accountability Sequence Model suggests that he did not sufficiently establish expectations for Brown and the other people responsible for the government's reaction to the emergency. Had he formed, communicated, aligned, and inspected the expectation that the right people would be in the right place at the right time with the right resources to deal with such a large-scale incident, Brown, FEMA, and everyone else involved would have done a much better job serving the people of New Orleans. In fact, had Secretary Chertoff properly moved through the steps in the Outer Ring, he might have asked someone other than the reluctant Brown to head up the effort. The resulting failure of those he was counting on to fulfill his own expectations put Chertoff in the predicament that ensnares anyone who has not effectively established expectations: he was left holding the bag, answering questions about missed expectations, failed performance, and dismal results.

**THE OUTER RING:
ESTABLISHING EXPECTATIONS**



Successfully holding others accountable to deliver on expectations, and doing it in a way that makes others feel good about it, requires real

effort and skill, even though the process itself is quite simple. The effort to move deliberately through each step of the Outer Ring develops the skill associated with the positive, principled approach, and it yields predictable and satisfying results, taking away any mystery and confusion about what people are expected to do.

Many people do not take the time to follow such logical and deliberate steps consistently. Instead, they expect people to fill in the blanks and move forward, regardless of their lack of clarity, resolving issues as they go and troubleshooting problems as they arise. When it comes to holding others accountable, they often picture someone with two hands clenched around someone else's neck, asking the question, "How in the world could that have happened?" Their experience has taught them that holding others accountable means issuing threats, shouting rebukes, and doling out punishment.

Unable to account for their own failure to effectively take the steps in the Outer Ring, they resort to holding others accountable by getting people to explain their failures and justify their unproductive actions. When they do that, they immerse themselves in an increasingly destructive process they hope will get themselves off the hook and put others on the spot to explain what went wrong. This process involves four familiar steps: Discover, Hunt, Scramble, and Hide. These four steps occur in most organizations at some time or another. People who follow them first try to *discover* what happened and pinpoint the nature of the "failure"; then they begin the process to *hunt* down the guilty parties, *scramble* to make the best of a bad situation, and, finally, *hide* and hope that no one will figure out the enormity of the mistake and come looking for someone to blame. Unfortunately, Discover, Hunt, Scramble, and Hide too often describes what it looks like to hold others accountable for results in organizations today. Given their experience in corporate life, most people would say that to hold someone accountable means "to follow up when things go wrong to ensure that people answer for their failures."

Our own definition, the one that drives the Outer Ring of the Accountability Sequence, empowers people in a practical and powerful way to influence results *before* things go wrong. To hold someone accountable means "to effectively form, communicate, align, and inspect the fulfillment of an expectation in the positive, principled way that enables people to achieve results now and in the future."

This is not just an abstract, "feel good" dictionary definition, however. We have implemented it in a step-by-step process that works both for

us and for our clients around the world. When you use the Accountability Sequence to hold people accountable to deliver on expectations, you win, they win, and each of your organization's stakeholders wins. Had Secretary Chertoff and his team used it, they would have saved themselves, their organizations, and the people their organizations serve a whole world of misery.

Although our approach to holding people accountable springs from a deep and abiding philosophy that accountability really matters in the world, we've taken it to the day-to-day practical level. Yes, you must learn to think about holding people accountable the right way, but you must also treat it as a practical skill you can develop with concentrated effort over time. Deliberately moving through the sequence, step-by-step, produces people who know what needs to be done, view it the same way you do, and deliver what you expect them to deliver, not just once, but every time!

The steps in the Outer Ring, as well as the methodologies within each step, provide a basic pattern you can tailor to each person in a way that works for them. We want to acknowledge that as much as we have worked to turn accountability into a science, there is still a lot of room left in the process for "art." To master the art of the sequence you must learn to work with people using a general framework that you adapt and apply in a way that produces a result unique to the situation and circumstance. Regardless of the variations you may play on the basic theme, a thorough understanding of the principles that provide the foundation for successfully moving through the steps of the Outer Ring will help you hold others accountable the positive, principled way.

THE THREE AXIOMS OF THE OUTER RING

Three axioms form the foundation for holding others accountable the positive, principled way and set the stage for taking the steps in the Outer Ring: the Accountability Fallacy, the Accountability Assumption, and the Accountability Truth.

The Accountability Fallacy

The first of these axioms, the Accountability Fallacy, captures a common mistake people make when they assume that others fail to follow through

because there is something wrong with them. This false assumption comes easily to most of us because we so clearly see the evidence that convicts the culprits of not caring enough or not working hard enough to get the job done the way we expect them to get it done. Basically, we assume people to be guilty until proven innocent. When leaders fall prey to the Accountability Fallacy, they not only assume that their people are flawed, but that they themselves can do little or nothing to change those flaws except punish people for having them. Real accountability always requires us to begin by looking at ourselves for anything that might be missing.

The Accountability Assumption

The second axiom, the Accountability Assumption, dictates that you should always begin with the assumption that, in any given circumstance, people are doing their very best to fulfill your expectations. This assumption, consistently applied, will start the whole journey toward holding others accountable on a positive and principled track. Whenever you begin by assuming the worst in others, you will most likely see their worst behavior (not to mention your own) emerge. The Accountability Assumption allows you to begin with the view that people want things to work just as much as you do and that they are doing all they can to make that happen. This approach not only brings out the best in you, but, with some rare exceptions, it accurately reflects the truth about the people with whom you work.

The Accountability Truth

Under all of this lies the third and final axiom, the Accountability Truth, which provides a more effective way of looking at the problem when people fail to follow through and deliver on expectations. By “truth,” we simply mean that when things go wrong, there is usually something wrong with what “I” am doing. When you embrace this principle, you take control of future outcomes and internalize the continual need to improve your effectiveness with respect to holding others accountable. Thinking and behaving this way produces better results. You become more proficient at getting things done through others. When you see yourself as part of the problem, you empower yourself to join the team that will do whatever it takes to solve it.