



PROFIT MATTERS

HOW DO YOUR NUMBERS LINE UP? | BY CHRIS "CHUBBY" FREDERICK

Employees Keeping You Up at Night?

Have you ever asked yourself what you could do differently to get your people to do what you want them to do? Here is what Tom Ringle, a veteran ATI shop owner coach, tells his clients. As shop owners with so many things to do to get through the day, you might find yourself seeking new ways to create or define accountability. So, what is accountability? We'll start there on our lesson.

Accountability is owning the consequences of our own actions and decisions. It means you are responsible to someone or something. Every person in the workplace must be held accountable. As owners and managers, you regularly deal with managing your work force. You believe you have the right talent in your workplace, yet goals are not being met — and the business isn't nearly as successful as you know it could be. Without accountability, reaching or achieving the goals of the business is not likely to happen.

Do you find yourself addressing the same concerns in your shop time and time again? You most likely have an issue with accountability. This is evident if you don't see your employees or your shop moving forward.

Step one is to identify the areas in which you find yourself and your team hitting a brick wall. Ask your employees to choose at least one area where they would like to see improvement. You already might know the obstacle that is keeping you and the shop from growing, but make your employees part of the process, and work on the solution as a team. Choose one area and

focus on it first. Once you begin to see the results, you'll be inspired to take on additional performance issues with a greater focus on accountability.

Outline the Employee's Role

Systems for accountability must begin with a clear focus and clearly set expectations.

In other words, who does what by when? Clearly outline the employees' roles. It's tough to hold employees accountable if they don't know for what or to whom they are accountable. Create job descriptions ensuring everyone knows what their basic area of responsibility is and to whom they report. On a regular basis, communicate to your employees that accountability and commitment are crucial to fulfilling the company mission; any lack of communication will be the downfall of the accountability process.

Chubby speaks about creating a culture in the workplace. Creating accountability means developing a climate in which employees, as members of the team, can speak openly, admit to mistakes without fear of reprimand and take more pride in serving the customer than in looking better than a co-worker. If the culture of your



QUESTION OF THE MONTH

QUESTION:

You need a coach to remind you that knowledge is not power, but taking action certainly is. Go do it this week!

Do you have a question for Chubby? E-mail him at cfredrick@autotraining.net.

shop allows for failure and you have a support system in place, self-responsibility will have a better chance to take root. When talking to employees regarding accountability, stay away from trigger words like “problem” or “weakness.” These trigger words may lead to defensiveness; instead, use words like “concerns” or “issues.”

Create a workplace environment where there is a high level of trust, so members of your team are independent and also interdependent. They have to share information and give and receive feedback in order to grow and improve.

Set your employees up to succeed. Minimize problems stemming from lack of organization or proper supervision. Consider the employees’ abilities to perform the job or task assigned. Give them a clear understanding of their responsibilities, the authority necessary to fulfill these responsibilities, and the knowledge that they hold accountability for their outcomes.

As owner or manager, determine whether the employee controls the accountability issue. If not, they cannot be held accountable for it. You, as owner, should make each team member aware of his or her roles and responsibilities. Clearly define the job standard or expectation; don’t always assume employees know what you want done or how the job should be completed. Detail and outline what you expect.

Once expectations are clearly defined, make sure employees are given a chance to voice their opinions, concerns or ideas. Concentrate more on your listening skills — this is a major opportunity to hear what is on your employees’ minds. To gain buy-in, ask questions like these: *Do you think we can hit this new productivity number? What things might stand in our way? What do we need in the form of training, tools or resources?* In this way, you and your employees reach an agreement on what is expected of them.

Empower Your People

Show the employees you are empowering them to be a part of the solution. You are not merely forcing a new standard they might believe is unreasonable or unobtainable. Accountability requires measurement, follow-up and consequences. As the saying goes, “If it can be measured, it can be improved.” Measuring and keeping score enables the owner and the employees to see whether they are meeting their objectives.

Employees like accountability because it brings a sense of accomplishment. They take pride in meeting the goals and expectations, and celebrate the success as a team. If the objectives are not met, there must be consequences. But don’t always focus on the negative — catch them doing something good and let them know about it. When they are held accountable, they know their role in the organization and will be more committed to making things happen. Give and receive frequent, honest feedback, and hold meetings on a regular basis. Once they can let go of fear, they will step up, improve and create better results.

As leaders and managers, we must have an expectation and a belief that people want to do their best. We only need to provide them with the tools and resources, and set and define expectations so they can do their jobs. As you strive to create an environment where accountability lives, employees will develop a focused awareness about their jobs and workplace — so they can concentrate their attention on meeting customer expectations. Have employees become more focused on problem-solving and less interested in protecting their own reputations.

Begin With the End in Mind

The word *accountability* often is ill-defined and rarely applied in our workplaces. It too often is defined as the act of holding others responsible for their actions whatever the results, good or bad. Accountability should not be used for assessing blame or punishment or used to unfairly reprimand, or simply to make a point. Accountability is about setting your expectations and clearly communicating them. Are you ready to look in the mirror and say “I will make the necessary change in my thinking about

accountability and clear expectations”? Will you hold yourself and your employees responsible for meeting the established expectations and goals that you and the team set out to achieve? Accountability and setting expectations is a process; begin with the end in mind.

Accountability is an achievable goal, once acknowledged, practiced and encouraged. When you take on accountability, you are no longer in fear of accepting responsibility. Accountability is not something you make people do; it must be chosen, accepted or mutually agreed upon by you and your employees. There has to be buy-in. I don’t believe anyone starts a job not wanting to do their best. Over time, some employees might become uninterested or complacent, and customer service suffers. But the more you and your employees together embrace accountability in your business, the more successful it will become. Having accountability and setting expectations are key components in your personal and business success both now and in the future.

Begin Right Now!

If you would like Chubby’s Quick Accountability Coaching System, simply go to www.ationlinetraining.com/2012-01 and start sleeping through the night. *ZZZ*

Chris “Chubby” Frederick is CEO and president of the Automotive Training Institute. He is thankful for assistance from ATI veteran coach Tom Ringle in preparing this monthly column. Contact Chubby at cfrick@autotraining.net.



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