

Dear Dr. Mazie,

Maybe I've been at it a bit too long, but I'm sick and tired of whiners, excuse makers, procrastinators, blamers and slackers. It seems so many folks just get by and don't really care about the quality of their work, much less feel any responsibility to their employer. I wasn't brought up that way, and I just don't understand these people. Maybe it is time for me to retire.



– Glenn in South Carolina

It is interesting that you bring this up. I've spent the last eight months extensively exploring the topic of personal responsibility and accountability in the workplace, and you have hit upon what business analysts have identified as the number one work problem for corporate America to address today. In fact, research shows that American businesses are losing billions, yes billions of dollars a year because of the lack of personal accountability by employees and/or supervisors and managers not holding their employees accountable.

There is a wealth of information about this lack of accountability, most of which is supported by industry research. My favorite resource is a book on the subject called "The Oz Principle" by Roger Connors and Tom Smith. They use the story and characters from the original Wizard of Oz as a metaphor of workplace America and the epidemic problem of lack of accountability.

The book points out that Dorothy, Scarecrow, Tin Man and the Lion all see themselves as victims. And as victims, their attitude of victimization is used to justify inaction, excuse ineffectiveness and/or rationalize poor performance, and in so doing, they unwittingly stifle their own progress.

Some folks call this the 'poor me' syndrome. The authors define it as Below the Line™ and illustrate it by the following stages:

IGNORE-DENY: A typical beginning point for those who become ensnared in the victim cycle. People pretend not to know that there is a problem, remain unaware that the problem affects them or choose to deny the problem altogether.

IT'S NOT MY JOB: This age-old excuse is a well-worn phrase that has been used in countless discussions to excuse inaction, to redirect blame and to avoid responsibility. This stage reflects awareness that something needs to be done, but is coupled with an acute avoidance of getting involved.

FINGER POINTING: In this well-practiced stage of the victim cycle, people deny their own responsibility for poor results and seek to shift the blame to others. "Don't blame me" is the catch phrase and mentality.

CONFUSION – TELL ME WHAT TO DO: At this more subtle stage of the victim cycle, people cite confusion as a way of alleviating themselves of their accountability. If they don't understand what's needed, surely they can't be expected to do anything about it.

COVER YOUR TAIL: This is when people build a false sense of protection by crafting elaborate and precise stories as to why they couldn't possibly be blamed for something that has gone wrong or hasn't been done. They have many excuses.

WAIT AND SEE: People remain mired in the victim cycle when they choose to wait and see if things will get better. However, in such a climate, problems can only get worse. This often becomes a sink-hole where possible solutions get swallowed up in a swamp of inaction.

This Below the Line™ behavior is obviously what is frustrating you Glenn, as it is so many other hard-working Americans. Let's compare it to the authors' preferred behavior for employees who seem to align with how you were raised. They call it the "Above the Line™" approach and it is really quite simple:

SEE IT ⇨ OWN IT ⇨ SOLVE IT ⇨ DO IT

These four simple steps say it well. First you must allow yourself to see the problem. Secondly, you take ownership of it—whether or not it really belongs to you. Then you find the best solution and take action to resolve the problem.

For more specifics and brilliant illustrations, I encourage you to get this book or listen to it on CD. They also offer free webinars that are quite informative.

Visit them at www.theozprinciple.com

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