

Part I

**ACCOUNTABILITY
AND YOU**

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CHAPTER

1 YOU ARE ACCOUNTABLE

“It’s a fact of life to be accountable.”

—Chris Litterio, *managing partner*

You were born an accountable person. That you are accountable is as unchangeable as your height, the size of your feet, the color of your skin, and who your birth parents are. Some things just are what they are. Accountability is one of those things.

As surely as you breathe the air, you are accountable. Even if we claim we are not—and we claim it often—we are still accountable. We can say we refuse to be accountable, but we still are accountable. Others can claim we are not accountable, but we are accountable.

We don’t take or choose accountability. We simply are accountable whether we like it or not, whether we want it or not.

Not everyone admits it, though. Not everyone even believes it. And not everyone has a mindset of accountability. If everyone on the planet did, the world would be home to fewer scandals, crises, wars, economic crashes, and crimes. If everyone at work did, the office would be a place of greater harmony, higher productivity, steeper profits, and happier associates.

If you believe you are accountable, you can enjoy a more successful career, more satisfying relationships, a lusher lifestyle, and a fatter paycheck—if those are things you want.

Samuel, a sales manager, says he wants those things, but he doesn't have them. He doesn't have the mindset. Samuel and his six-member team help field representatives assemble information before they go to meetings with clients. These sales professionals often need that information in a hurry.

Before he left the office on Monday night, Samuel scheduled a 9 A.M. conference call for the next day with a financial advisor who needed some last-minute help preparing for a 9:45 A.M. meeting. Early Tuesday morning, after a late night with some college buddies who were in town, Samuel called in sick. He told the colleague who answered his 8:15 A.M. call to notify the advisor that the conference call was off. The colleague forgot.

The advisor threw a fit when Samuel didn't call and didn't answer his phone. Samuel responded by blaming his absent-minded colleague. The colleague insisted it wasn't her responsibility to notify the advisor. Their manager chastised both, saying Samuel could have notified the advisor himself via e-mail and the co-worker who took the early morning call could have done the same.

Weeks later, Samuel still blames his colleague for what happened next: Because the advisor did not have the information he needed for his 9:45 A.M. meeting, he gave his client a price estimate that was too low. His choice: Take a huge hit on his commission or risk alienating the client by righting the price. He took the hit.

So did Samuel. The advisor complained about him to his boss and to his boss's boss, and the advisor will never trust his own sales manager again.

Another manager in the same company resolved another situation in a different way. At twenty-five, Tim is his firm's youngest manager, so he's diligent about building a reputation as a reliable professional whom financial advisors can count on—despite his inexperience.

So it cut him to the core when an advisor e-mailed him to say, “I guess you don’t want to help me. I’ll let everybody know.” Tim didn’t know what the advisor was talking about. He wanted to help. So he scoured prior e-mails in a hunt for the advisor’s request. He couldn’t find it. He asked a team member to take over another small case he had been working on, and he called the advisor immediately to tell him he had not seen the original request but would answer his questions right away.

That salvaged the relationship: “I followed through on the solution, and now, it’s like it never happened,” Tim says.

He also put a new process in place for his team. Tim has his team phone anyone who e-mails in a request to acknowledge the correspondence within minutes of receiving it. The team member estimates how long it will take to research and fill the request. That way, if the information doesn’t come immediately, the caller will understand why. And the manager can determine how time-sensitive the request is.

Tim knows he is accountable for meeting the expectations of the sales professionals he supports. So he manages those expectations.

“We under-promise and over-deliver,” he says. “When you’re getting eight to twelve e-mails an hour, you can’t get everything done right away. What you can do is call the advisor to work out a delivery time.”

Tim has a mindset of accountability. He also has better relationships with the advisors than Samuel does; they trust him to follow-up with them to make sure their requests get filled. His days are far less stressful than Samuel’s, and he can’t remember the last time an advisor went over his head to complain about him to his boss.

Tim is what he was born to be: personally accountable for his choices and actions.

