

## The Architecture of Accountability

*"First we shape our structures, and then our structures shape us."*

Winston Churchill

Accountability is the structure upon which a masterful life is built. It is embedded in every successful relationship, culture, and business.

Among the vast library of business titles available today, few have retained their relevancy more than *The Oz Principle*, the groundbreaking book on accountability by authors Connors, Smith, and Hickman. In it, they illuminate one of the central metaphors of L. Frank Baum's classic story, *The Wizard of Oz*. **We are all accountable for the results we want in our lives. The wizard is inside all of us.**

This is actually great news. The problem is that many of us choose to remain victims of circumstance.

*The choice is yours.  
Accountability.....or not.*

Accountability is often viewed from a negative perspective. "Who's accountable for this mess?" "I am holding you accountable for the failure of this project." Seen in this way, accountability appears to be the result of some failure. The toxic disempowerment of this perspective deprives the viewer of a most abundant gift. Accountability.

The viability of your business and the vitality of your personal life and relationships are dependent upon you being accountable. You must first take ownership of your circumstances before you can control your results. To paraphrase an oft quoted message from Mahatma Gandhi, "be the person you wish to see in the world."



LIFENESS HARMONIZE AN  
ENTREPRENEURIAL LIFE

Accountability is a state of being. A choice. A choice to own the circumstances of your life. When things don't go as you had hoped, it is an opportunity to ask, "What part did I play in this situation? What can I do to change it?" Being accountable puts you in control of the events in your life. Not the victim of them.

Martin Luther King was not a victim of racism. He was a charismatic leader with clear plan to change his world. He could have chosen to be a victim, but that would have deprived him of the opportunity to lead a nation towards the realization of his "dream."

For you to realize your dream, you must build your accountability on a solid foundation. The bricks, mortar, and level you will need to construct this foundation are clarity, responsibility, and commitment.

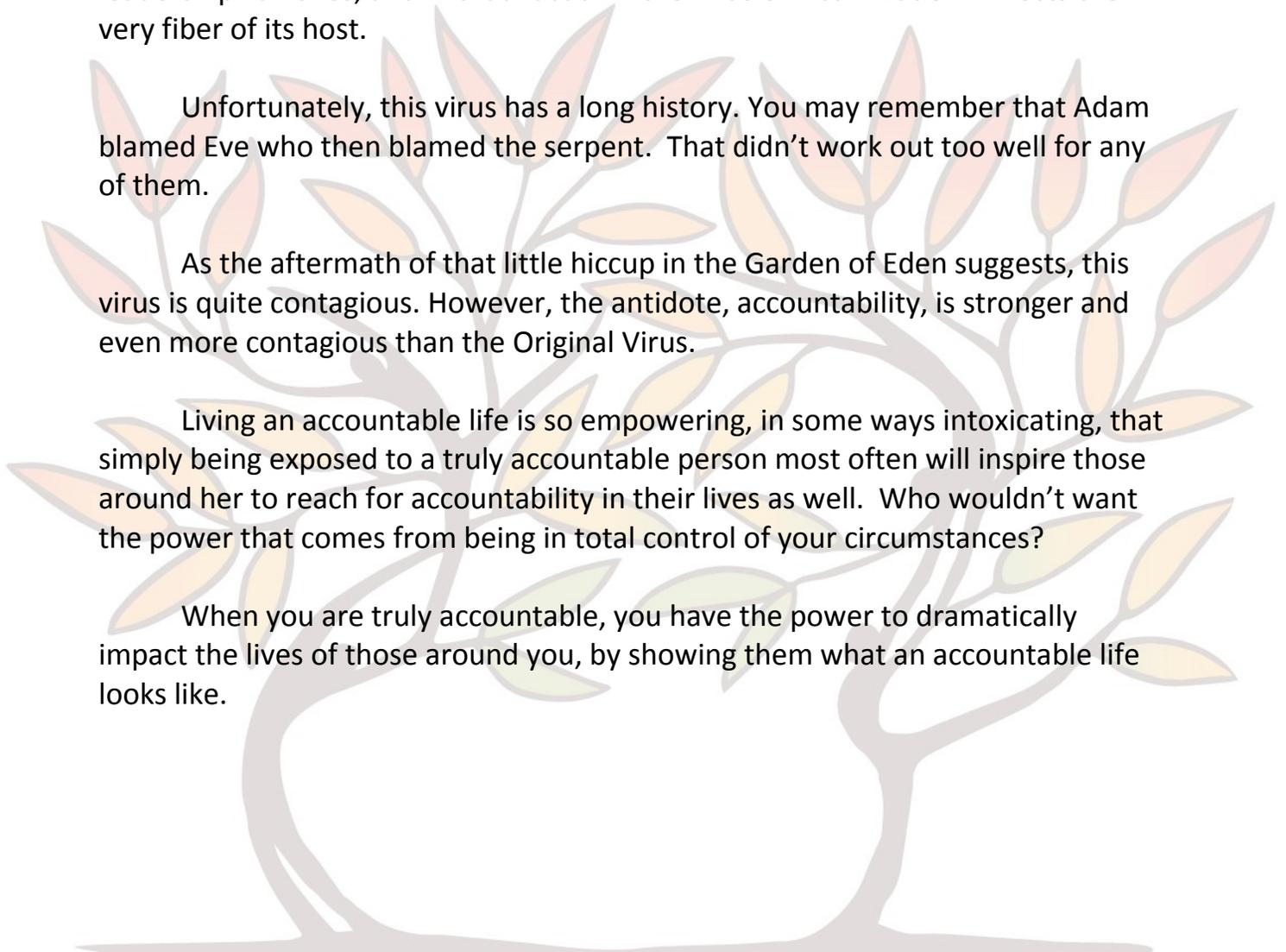
Accountability is a fundamental source of power, leadership, and self esteem. *The Oz Principle* teaches us that in the absence of accountability, leadership vanishes, and in that vacuum "the virus of victimization" infects the very fiber of its host.

Unfortunately, this virus has a long history. You may remember that Adam blamed Eve who then blamed the serpent. That didn't work out too well for any of them.

As the aftermath of that little hiccup in the Garden of Eden suggests, this virus is quite contagious. However, the antidote, accountability, is stronger and even more contagious than the Original Virus.

Living an accountable life is so empowering, in some ways intoxicating, that simply being exposed to a truly accountable person most often will inspire those around her to reach for accountability in their lives as well. Who wouldn't want the power that comes from being in total control of your circumstances?

When you are truly accountable, you have the power to dramatically impact the lives of those around you, by showing them what an accountable life looks like.



*“More important than the quest for certainty is the quest for clarity.”*

Francois Gauthier

Clarity is the brick with which we build the foundation of our accountability. To come to any substantive agreement with any individual or group, all of the terms must be clear to all of the parties involved. Whether in a business or personal setting, clarification is the best way to avoid future misunderstandings.

You wouldn't give your 16-year-old son the keys to the car on a beautiful summer day and say, "Please bring the car back some time this evening." Nor would you ask your VP of sales to "Make sure your team sells some stuff this month."

Do these examples sound a little better?

- Great! So that report will be on my desk by 5pm this afternoon?
- Yes! I will pick you up at your house at 7:30 Friday evening.
- Of course! Your order will be delivered to your office by 3pm this afternoon.
- I will have three versions of the photo ready for you to review at 9am tomorrow.

It is important to remember that ***being accountable means being clear about what can be expected of you, as well as what you expect of others.*** This transparency can be difficult for those of us used to playing the blame game. Remember, if we are all clear about our expectations, there is no escape hatch if we don't deliver.

Let's go back to the examples above. They seem pretty clear, right? Maybe not. What if the person delivering the report by 5pm tomorrow assumes that you will be in the office to review it at that time, and you are out of town? What if the person you are picking up at 7:30 on Friday thinks you are going to a fancy restaurant and you show up in shorts and a tee shirt ready for McDonald's and a

movie? What if the person delivering the order thinks it is supposed to go to your office in New York and you are in the Chicago office?

You get the point. Being accountable means taking the risk to be absolutely clear; leaving yourself with no excuses if you don't deliver. Of course, if you don't deliver, you will have the opportunity to set an example for those around you by accepting the results of your failure rather than looking for someone to blame.

You see, clarity must be deeply embedded in the fabric of all our relationships; in the culture of our businesses. The first step to getting total buy-in on this is to **be clear first**. Model clarity for those around you. *The Oz Principle* offers this simple observation: "Accountability begins, without exception, with clearly defining the results you want and need to achieve."

It is important to know that this can be done from the bottom as well as the top of the food chain. If your boss is frequently vague and makes outrageous demands that are impossible to fulfill, show her that you are eager to give her what she wants by getting clarity. Let her know that her needs are your top priority, and you want to make sure you are clear so you can support her in reaching her goals.

By modeling clarity for your boss, your spouse, or even your parents, you can enroll them in the culture of accountability that you need to move forward effectively.

*"The price of greatness is responsibility."*

Winston Churchill

The late Freddie Prinze skyrocketed to fame in the 1970's with the catchphrase "It's not my job, man." His humor illuminated a frustration that is still all too frequent in our daily lives.

We've all had some variation of the following experience: The humanoid on the other end of the line who says "I'm sorry sir, I realize that you did not order the lime green shag carpet for your office, but you will need to discuss that

with the independent installer who did the job. We just sell the carpet. After it leaves our warehouse, we have no control over what happens to it.” Gee thanks.

On the other hand, Zappos, the online shoe retailer, is almost as well known for their incredible customer service as they are for their vast supply of shoes. Being responsible is an integral part of the Zappos culture. If you haven’t read Tony Hsieh’s book, *Delivering Happiness*, pick it up and you will see what extreme accountability looks like. He effectively created a customer service company that happens to sell shoes.

As the leader of a team, the parent of a child, or a cashier at the grocery store, being responsible is the best way to gain the respect of those around you. Notice also the power to be gained from being responsible. No longer are you at the mercy of others. “It’s not my job,” becomes “Let me see what I can do to solve this problem.”

Don’t be afraid to invite the people in your life to evaluate your progress. Living accountably requires being open enough to acknowledge when you are falling short of your goals. So ask those around you how you are doing. Really.

How do you think your team will feel when they know that you are open to hearing the truth about your performance? They’ll love it. And respect you for it. Do you think that will make it easier for you to be honest with them? Of course you do! Another great point from *The Oz Principle*: “Accountable people seek feedback and feedback creates accountable people.”

Do you see the victim energy that comes from avoiding responsibility? By saying “It’s not my job” or “It’s her fault,” we miss the opportunity to take control of the situation and solve the problem. That is the place where success lives.

The greatness Churchill refers to in the quote above is not achievable by the victim. We expect greatness from our leaders, our role models, and the presidents of our organizations; not another chorus of the blame game. Be relentlessly responsible, and leadership is destined to be part of your portfolio.

*“Unless commitment is made, there are only promises and hopes; but no plans.*

Peter F Drucker

Accountability is not a sometime thing. Clarity and responsibility are great, yet they are just occasional moments of light if we don't stay committed to being accountable. Nothing happens before a commitment is made.

Inviting a partner or coach to join you on the journey to being (and staying) accountable, is a great way to stay committed to your goal. Having an accountability partner or coach to encourage, guide, and offer you honest feedback as you harness the personal power that comes with living an accountable life is likely to strengthen your resolve and increase the likelihood that you will stay the course.

You might ask someone you admire, perhaps a mentor, if she would agree to support you in this way. Perhaps you know someone who would like to team up and be your accountability partner while you offer him the same gift.

You may also choose to hire a trained professional to coach you through the process. Whatever path you choose, stay the course. The end result is too important to give it anything less than your best effort.

It is important here to note the difference between being accountable and being **held** accountable. Being accountable is a way of living powerfully and in control of your life. Holding someone accountable is about looking for a place to lay the blame.

Blaming energy is absent in an accountable culture. We take responsibility for the results of our actions **before** they happen. Companywide, family-wide, individually, or as a team, a culture of accountability is essential for long term success.

*Accountability from the top.....  
Straight to the bottom line.*

Higher profits, system wide integrity and cohesive teamwork are all by-products of an accountability based culture. An accountable team is far more

agile, and able to respond quickly to the inevitable bumps in the road that might otherwise derail a less empowered group.

Each member of an accountable team is looking for ways to take responsibility for anything that stands in the way of success. In the absence of blame, an accountable team looks for solutions. The organic power that comes from within an accountable culture is the most essential ingredient in the recipe for success in every aspect of your life.

Be accountable. Take control. The results will amaze you.

So....

Don't forget to buy *The Oz Principle*. It will fill you up with inspiration and ideas for bringing the culture of accountability to your home or workplace. You might also want to pick up a copy of Tony Hsieh's great read, *Delivering Happiness*. You'd be hard pressed to find a better book on building a corporate culture around the happiness of both the customers and the employees.

I hope this article has been helpful for you. Please come back and visit this site often. I frequently post new and valuable stuff for my clients and friends.

I enjoy helping my clients **Be Accountable**. If you would like to learn more about how I work, click the contact tab and drop me a line. Or, you can email me directly at [Tom@TomRubens.com](mailto:Tom@TomRubens.com)

