

CHAPTER THREE

THE CIRCLE STARTS HERE

BLAME VS. ACCOUNTABILITY

My father instilled in me a "profound and radical sense of accountability." We are not talking about your average run-of-the-mill sense of responsibility here. Responsibility is task-oriented. Tasks can be assigned or shared, like a child's sticker chart or a "box-and-1 defense" at a high school basketball game. The players all have responsibilities; the coach is accountable for overseeing the implementation of the play (I was an off-guard if anyone is wondering...). Accountability is what happens after a situation has occurred. It is how you respond and take ownership of results. Profound means far below the surface, deep or reaching great depths, and radical means change at the root cause of a matter. Well, in my father's opinion, I was always the root cause in any matter.

Abstracting this, having a profoundly radical sense of accountability means that someone takes responsibility for their actions and decisions to an extreme degree. It implies that the individual goes

beyond the usual or conventional levels of accountability and holds themselves to very high standards. They are not just willing to accept responsibility for their actions; they are actively committed to ensuring they are held accountable for every aspect of their behavior, choices, and impact on others. This level of accountability often involves a deep commitment to transparency, integrity, and a willingness to face consequences or make amends when they fall short of their responsibilities. When the going gets tough, the tough hold themselves accountable.

Ask yourself. When things go wrong, is your default position to push the problem away and blame others, or is it to take it all in, decipher your accountability, and work towards changing actions to impact future results? Blame shifting comes from a position of weakness, a lack of control. Accountability is an extension of confidence and an unwavering trust in abilities to make sound decisions and handle challenges effectively. I know it sounds like a heavy weight to carry. But oddly enough, I grew up feeling empowered.

As far back as I can remember, I have had these little sayings in my head that have deep meaning and carry me through "challenging" times. I don't know if I made them up or pilfered them along the way (you can't prove anything), but nonetheless, they exist. The 'circle starts here' is a standard sacred text that plays on a loop in my head when trying to sort things out, and it captures the essence of personal accountability, even in a professional environment. The circle starts when you realize you have the power to control, if not your life, at least your reactions.

In any part of my life, when I am not getting the results I want, the "circle starts here" plays in my head on a loop, like an earworm 80's song after a short elevator ride (it's always an 80's song. I am not complaining, just stating facts). This is followed by a short question

and answer session with myself: Why am I not getting the results I want? What culpability do I have in this? What could I have done to get to where I wanted to be? Am I choosing the right people to share this experience with? Am I expecting more than I should or more than others can give? What changes can I make to influence the outcome and circumstances moving forward? Why can't I get this song out of my head? You get the idea!

Being accountable enables me to take control of my life, and I rely on my judgment and values to guide my choices rather than seek external validation or approval. I strive to consistently meet my objectives, uphold my values, and deliver results. Accountability fosters my personal growth, resilience, confidence, and self-reliance, ultimately leading to a greater sense of peace about my decisions and the trajectory of my life. It is also essential for building trust in both personal and professional relationships for several reasons:

- **Consistency:** When you consistently take accountability for your actions and decisions, it creates a sense of reliability. Others can trust that you will follow through on your commitments and obligations.
- **Transparency:** Accountability involves being open and honest about your actions, even when mistakes occur. This transparency builds trust because it shows that you have nothing to hide and are willing to address issues openly.
- **Integrity:** Holding yourself accountable demonstrates your integrity and commitment to ethical behavior. People are more likely to trust those who adhere to principles of honesty and ethics.
- **Reliability:** Accountable individuals are seen as reliable. They do what they say they will do, and this reliability fosters trust. In contrast, unreliable individuals who constantly make excuses erode trust. You must build a business on a stable foundation.

- **Conflict Resolution:** In personal and professional settings, conflicts and misunderstandings can arise. Being accountable means you are willing to acknowledge your role in any conflicts and work towards resolution. This willingness to resolve issues contributes to a positive and trusting environment.

- **Professionalism:** In a professional context, accountability is a hallmark of professionalism. It shows that you take your responsibilities seriously and are committed to the success of your organization or team.

- **Empathy and Understanding:** When you hold yourself accountable, it demonstrates empathy and understanding towards others. You acknowledge the impact of your actions on those around you, which can strengthen relationships.

"People-pleasing is like a one-way ticket to nowhere."

-Unknown

Somewhere between the personalities of a "Blame-shifter" and "Accountability-Taker" lies a distant cousin (twice removed) that no one wants to hang out with at the family Christmas party; I present to you the "People-pleaser." Although a "Blame-Shifter" would never be mistaken for a "People-pleaser," it is possible (on the surface) to assume or mistake an "Accountability-taker" for a "People-pleaser." Being a "People-pleaser" and an "Accountability-taker" are two distinct behaviors with different motivations and outcomes:

People-Pleaser:

- **Motivation:** People-pleasers have a strong desire to gain the approval and acceptance of others. They often prioritize the happiness and satisfaction of others over their own needs and desires.

- **Behavior:** People-pleasers tend to say yes to requests or demands from others, even if it goes against their own wishes or boundaries. They may avoid conflict and confrontation at all costs to maintain harmony in relationships.

- **Outcome:** While people-pleasers may be well-liked and avoid conflicts, they often end up feeling resentful, overwhelmed, and stressed because they prioritize others' needs at the expense of their own. This behavior can lead to burnout and strained relationships in the long run.

Accountability-Taker:

- **Motivation:** Being an "Accountability-taker" involves acknowledging one's mistakes, actions, and responsibilities. The motivation is to ensure fairness, honesty, and integrity in one's actions and interactions.

- **Behavior:** Individuals who take accountability admit when they have made a mistake, take ownership of their actions, and are willing to face the consequences. They are open to feedback and actively seek ways to make amends or improve.

- **Outcome:** Being an "Accountability-taker" fosters trust and respect in relationships, as it shows maturity and a commitment to personal growth. It can lead to resolution and learning from one's

mistakes, ultimately strengthening relationships and personal development.

Both behaviors have their place, but it's important to strike a balance and prioritize self-care and personal growth alongside consideration for others. My profound and radical sense of accountability empowers me to shape my life. It enables me to take ownership of my outcomes and reduce stress and anxiety by acknowledging the control and influence I have in my life. Being accountable also creates a foundation of trust, reliability, and open communication in my relationships fostering healthier and more fulfilling connections with others. It is a driving force that propels me toward a fulfilling and purpose-driven life. I wish you a profound and radical sense of accountability in your life.

"Accountability is the glue that ties commitment to results."

-Bob Proctor

Circle Starts Here: The Flight Plan

Imagine a circle with you standing at its center. It's where the journey begins – the decisions, actions, and responses that mold your life. Picture it as the cockpit of your life, with you as the pilot. Within this circle, there's no room for blame games or finger-pointing. It's about taking the steps to assume command of your decisions. On January

15, 2009, Captain Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger landed U.S. Airways Flight 1549 in the Hudson River after a bird strike disabled both plane's engines in the skies over New York City. In the absolute final few seconds before intersecting with the watery surface of the earth, Sully turned to First Officer Jeff Skiles and asked, "Got any ideas?" to which Skiles responded, "Actually not." Years later, Sully recounted that day and the depth of the meaning behind his question to his first officer. Both pilots were able to collaborate almost wordlessly, and in those final seconds, with only 3 words, Sully asked Skiles if there were any other actions Skiles could think of that would help them succeed, even by a fraction. This pivotal moment exemplifies how the "circle starts here," is at the center of one's determination and accountability, and how a pilot's quick thinking and collaborative spirit can make all the difference in critical situations, turning adversity into triumph. You are the pilot in your own life.

*"There is freedom waiting for you, On the breezes
of the sky, And you ask "What if I fall?" Oh, but
my darling, What if you fly?"*

-Erin Hanson

Being accountable and believing that the "circle starts here" in personal relationships is a pathway to establishing credibility. It also allows you to brand your expertise, simplify your life, and gain more business in your professional life. Trust is the foundation of healthy and productive relationships, and accountability plays a crucial role

in building and maintaining that trust. From preflight to a successful landing, there are clear objectives to fulfill in order to be accountable to become accountable.

- **Self-Reflection:** Your pre-flight preparation (yes, we are still on the plane metaphor) includes regularly taking time to assess your intentions, actions, and decisions. Just as a pilot checks weather conditions and maybe bird migration patterns (no shade, Sully!), self-reflection involves understanding the circumstances, intentions, and influences surrounding one's actions. Your pre-flight checks allow you to identify potential issues affecting your plan.

- **Set Clear Objectives:** Define your goals and create a comprehensive plan to achieve them. This is your communication with Air Traffic Control (ATC), asking for clearance and instructions. Break down larger goals into manageable steps and track your progress. Focus. Clarity. Achievement. If you often use the phrase "it's not working," I would suggest you are the "it" that isn't working.

- **Solicit Feedback:** Navigate according to the flight plan but encourage others to provide constructive feedback. Listening to different perspectives enables you to make more informed decisions. Remember, conversations do not need to be confrontations and be aware of human tendencies to seek out echo chambers. The goal is to improve, not be "right."

- **Embrace Mistakes:** Perform maneuvers and make corrections as needed during the flight. Instead of deflecting & blame, admit when you're wrong. Offer apologies if necessary and take steps to rectify your errors. Embracing our mistakes is essential for personal growth, resilience, creativity, and building trust with others. Also, keep in mind that our reactions to mistakes can be very "telling." Anger is considered a secondary emotion because it typically stems from more primary feelings such as fear, concern, or embarrassment. These un-

derlying emotions can trigger anger as a protective response to mask vulnerability. Understanding that anger is usually a surface reaction to deeper issues can help you more readily accept your mistakes and learn from others, as it encourages a deeper exploration of your true feelings and the reasons behind them.

- **Stay Committed:** Accountability is a lifelong commitment. Remember, sometimes you will need to become singularly focused on your goals. I often tell my coaching clients that being good at multitasking means you are poor at time management. Because it's true. On that cold January day in the skies of New York, Captain Sullivan had about three minutes to save 155 lives. He focused on only the things that would allow him to reach his goal and nothing else. Everything else was a distraction. The power to shape your destiny lies within your circle of influence, even during challenging times.

It is important to know what steps to take to succeed. You must trust your instincts, rely on your experience, and follow your plan, but be flexible. If things are not going as expected, analyze the results, and don't be afraid to ask, "Got any ideas?"