

CRESITA LLC

NEWSLETTER

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Accountability vs. Responsibility

What is the difference between accountability and responsibility? For many organizations that I have worked with, accountability is often called for by staff as a surrogate marker for disciplining those individuals that do not feel are doing their job properly.

For me, responsibility entails doing something before you're even asked or told to do it. Accountability simply means to me that you're doing your job. When you are accountable, you're accomplishing tasks that are in your job description when you're responsible, you're doing whatever needs to be done to help the team or organization be successful, regardless of whether it is your job or not.

For example, a person that is part of a department within a hospital that does not restock supplies on their shift when they run out, is not only lapsing in accountability, assuming restocking supplies is in their position description, but to me shows a lack of responsibility. It is dangerous to assume that the next shift is not busy unless you've actually witnessed that and supervisors have commented on that. I frequently say that a desk is a dangerous place to view the world and this is just one example. This is also an example of being crystal clear about what the job entails.

To me, it comes down to the simple question of defining what business you're in. In our previous example, if you are working in a hospital, I think you should define what you're doing as being in the patient care business. In this example, put yourself in the shoes of the patient; would you or a loved one really want to wait on a supply if it is needed? Would you find it acceptable that a delay is related to the fact that the prior shift did not restock a supply because they felt that the next shift could do it? I had a colleague that always

implored us to put the patient in the center of the care process if you're not in a healthcare field, I think you could probably replace patient with customer.

To me, the terms accountability and responsibility have very distinct meanings, so I would say choose your words carefully. In other words, before you state that someone should be held accountable think about what you are asking for. While I would agree it is not fair for someone not to do their job or hold up their end of their responsibilities, resolving those issues should be brought to management. If management is not responsive to these complaints, then shame on them as they should be observing what's going on in the workplace.

One way to avoid any drama in the workplace is for each employee to honestly look in the mirror and ask themselves what business they are in. If individuals are doing this, I would say they're exercising responsibility. To my way of thinking, I would rather have an employee who's responsible because they're going to be willing to go above and beyond to accomplish the goals of the organization. Otherwise, the endless complaining about co-workers not being responsible does little more than contribute to a toxic work environment.

So next time someone says that a co-worker should be held accountable, think about what they are really saying.