

NOW!

FAIL OR THRIVE

Excerpts for Busy Leaders

Essential Business Concepts

Time Honored Practices

Possibilities to Consider

Inspiring Thoughts

Compiled by
Ronald D. Sears



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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my brother Norman F. Sears who never reached his full potential.

I am the person; I am today because of him.

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To the Reader:

When Mr. Sears was my Academic Dean, I had the privilege of working as a Program Director under his guidance. He mentored many leaders, including myself, during his years of leadership, and he will continue to mentor many more by making this book available as a guide to those in leadership or managerial roles. His method of compiling this book is impressive! Knowing how valuable every second is in a leader's day and how important it is to get a fast reference in a timely manner, he divided the book into eight parts, each with critical business points, great quotes, and additional reading suggestions to consider. The book was extremely user-friendly and would be a valuable addition to any leader's or manager's reference library.

Gaylene Lee, MEd, RRT, RRT-NPS, RRT-ACCS, TTS

About This Book

After years of researching leadership and management methods, I discovered that many of books on the subjects contained in this book were packed with useful knowledge if you had the time to read them during your busy day. A main thought or quote was often used as a key takeaway for further examination of a situation or problem to be solved. This conclusion inspired the development of this book, which is designed for those who want to get to the point quickly.

NOW! Fail or Thrive is written in the style of the famous Dummies Book series, but it is more streamlined for those who are short on time. The author has spent many hours reading and selecting excerpts and quotations from a wide range of business and personal development topics. It is important that the reader understands that the excerpts and quotes in this book come from original sources and are not the author's work. When sharing any excerpts or quotations, please give credit to the original author, not the author of this book.

This is a book for the executive or manager who is constantly on the move. The goal of NOW! Fail or Thrive is to make it simple to find answers or alternatives to consider when running an organization. It is not intended to be a comprehensive examination of a topic. For further study, suggested reading resources are provided.

NOW! Fail or Thrive is divided into eight parts: Accountability and Dependability, Communication, Effectiveness, Employees, Leadership and Management, Thinking and Problem Solving, and Time-Honored Virtues and Personal Development, and Just One More Thing. This book and its contents will always be incomplete because new methods and ideas are constantly being developed. However, the fundamentals remain constant and true.

Ronald D. Sears

*“Learning without reflection is a waste,
reflection without learning is dangerous.”*

Confucius

Part 1
Accountability & Dependability

“Accountability is the glue that ties commitment to the result.”

Bob Proctor

“The greatest ability is dependability.”

Bob Jones Sr.

Accountability Can Have Positive Results

"I believe that accountability is the basis of all meaningful human achievement." Sam Silverstein

According to U.S. Office of Personnel Management

Accountability means being held answerable for accomplishing a goal or assignment. Unfortunately, the word "accountability" often connotes punishment or negative consequences. Certainly, management should not tolerate poor performance and should take action when it occurs. However, when organizations use accountability only as a big stick for punishing employees, fear and anxiety permeate the work environment. Employees are afraid to try new methods or propose new ideas for fear of failure. On the other hand, if approached correctly, accountability can produce positive, valuable results.

The positive results of practicing a constructive approach to accountability include:

- Improved performance.
- More employee participation and involvement.
- Increased feelings of competency.
- Increased employee commitment to the work.
- More creativity and innovation.
- Higher employee morale and satisfaction with the work.

These positive results occur when employees view accountability programs as helpful and progressive methods of assigning and completing work. For example, managers who involve employees in setting goals and expectations find that employees understand expectations better, are more confident that they can achieve those expectations, and perform at a higher level. Positive results also occur when employees don't associate accountability only with negative consequences. If employees do not fear failure, if managers recognize employees for their accomplishments, and if managers support their employees when goals become difficult, employees are more likely to be creative, innovative, and committed to their work.

Managers need to:

- Involve employees in setting clear, challenging yet attainable goals and objectives, and give them the authority to accomplish those goals.
- Coach employees when they request help, and support employees in all aspects of the job.
- Monitor progress towards goals, and provide feed-back that includes credible, useful performance measures.
- Provide the training and resources employees need to do the work.
- Recognize employees for good performance, both formally and informally.

The General Accounting Office (GAO) recently surveyed 3,816 full-time mid- and upper-level managers on their perceptions about performance and management issues. Here are the findings:

- 63 percent of managers said they were held accountable for the results of their programs.
- 36 percent of them said they had the authority they needed to accomplish strategic goals.
- 31 percent of managers said that employees received positive recognition for helping to achieve organizational goals. If managers are going to hold employees accountable for results, they also need to recognize employees for their efforts.

Suggested Reading

Balanced Accountability: How to Win Hearts and Maximize Performance by Hernani Alves

Point of Reflection

“Accountability is a key concept in moving an organization forward, especially in a challenging business climate.”

Cindy Tucker

Being Dependable at Work

"Don't make any promises that you can't keep." Ann Marie Aguilar

Notable Quotes

"If your actions don't live up to your words, you have nothing to say." DaShanne Stokes

"Dependability is more important than talent. Dependability is a talent, and it is a talent all can have. It makes no difference how much ability we possess if we are not responsible and dependable." Floy L. Bennett

"A man who lacks reliability is utterly useless." Confucius

According to Lee J. Colan, PhD: Seven Ways to Become the Most Reliable Person in the Room

Manage commitments. Ask yourself if a commitment is a high priority for you. Focus on timelines (when work gets done) versus deadlines (when work is due). Know when to say no.

Proactively communicate. If you make a promise that you can't meet because of truly terrible and unforeseen circumstances, let the person know as soon as possible.

Start and finish. The best way to finish strong is to start strong. Keeping your word or simply doing the right thing is rarely convenient, so reliable people let their actions rise above their excuses.

Excel daily. Implement daily disciplines to sharpen your focus, and strive for everyday excellence. Excellence does not equal perfection (which can be a barrier to reliability).

Be truthful. Be full of truth-tell the full truth. Does everything you use to communicate tell the full truth? If not, you are a source of unreliable information.

Respect time, yours and others'. If you tell someone you can meet at a certain time, you have made a promise. Being on time shows others that you are a person of your word.

Value your values. Your values should dictate your behavior, not your circumstances or fleeting feelings. Being a reliable person not only means doing what you say, it also means doing what is right, regardless of what you have committed to.

According to Duncan Muguku, founder of ThriveYard:

6 Tips on How to Prioritize Work and Meet Deadlines

1. Listing down tasks on a master to-do list. A simple to-do list can have four columns showing item numbers, tasks, due dates or deadlines and priority levels. It is important to maintain an up to date to-do list and also to keep an electronic back-up of your to-do list. Your master to-do list serves as a running log of what you need to accomplish over time. A good practice is to update a to-do list at the end of each day where you delete items that have been completed and add new tasks to work on. This also gives you a preview of what the following day's schedule would look like.

Benefits of writing a to-do list include the following:

- Helps you to keep track of everything that you need to work on.
- Helps you to stay organized and manage time.
- Aids our memory so we don't have to struggle to remember everything we need to work on.
- A good reminder for recurring or repetitive tasks.

- Improves efficiency and increases productivity.
- Personal satisfaction when tasks are accomplished.

2. Prioritizing your work. Prioritizing helps you to visually see the highest to the lowest priority tasks. Prioritization is an ongoing activity; it can be done once a day and sometimes even multiple times a day as priorities change during the day.

Questions to guide you when setting priorities:

- What needs to be done immediately?
- What are the consequences if the task is not done?
- When should you start working on the task?
- What resources and inputs do I need to complete this task?
- What has not been done that should have been done?

Questions to guide you when tracking progress on your priority list:

- What tasks have I completed?
- What is the outcome when a task is completed?
- What am I constantly postponing on my list? Why?
- What should not have been on the list in the first place?
- How can I shorten my to-do list?

3. Breaking large tasks into smaller pieces. The thought of handling a big task or project all at once can be overwhelming that is why it is a good idea to break up large projects into more manageable components then start working on one small step after another. Breaking down projects helps to keep sight of future tasks that need to be started early on to meet the due date.

4. Estimating time and effort/being realistic on what you can do in a day. When a list of priorities is too long and is frequently not completed, it can cause frustration over time. Setting realistic expectations helps to build and preserve your reliability and credibility. In addition, it not only meets personal expectations but also meets expectations of your boss, team members and others.

Below are some tips on how to best plan and execute your priorities:

- Visualize what the final outcome will look like for each task you do.
- Endeavor to start and work on a task until it is finished.
- Schedule time to do work on your calendar.
- Start work on your priorities early enough to avoiding rushing at the last minute to meet deadlines.
- Take small breaks to get rejuvenated.
- Follow up on delegated work.
- Anticipate challenges that you may encounter.

5. Giving status updates/reporting progress. Critical components for getting along well with your boss and other stakeholders include regular communication and providing status updates. This is typically achieved through regularly scheduled check-in meetings with your manager and also through meetings with others.

6. Dealing with changing deadlines and priorities. When deadlines and priorities change at a moment's notice, it can have the potential of throwing your well-laid plans into disarray. It could increase your workload and heighten pressure to perform to meet tight deadlines. Being flexible and adaptable is critical in navigating scenarios where the goal posts have moved. Aim to change gears as smoothly as possible despite the limited time to make adjustments.

When faced with changing deadlines and priorities:

- Keep your cool, stay calm.
- Gain a good understanding of the requirements and desired outputs for the new priorities.
- Work with your manager to prioritize the new project or deadlines and reprioritize existing work.
- If possible, renegotiate an extension for existing deadlines to accommodate the emergency priorities.
- Identify the best way to complete the new tasks as quickly and efficiently as possible.
- Breakdown the work and begin handling it immediately.
- If necessary, ask for help in meeting tight deadlines including delegating to others.
- Whenever possible, politely seek to understand the need for the changes in deadlines or priorities.
- Work closely with other team members who are critical in ensuring new deadlines are met.

Suggested Reading

How to Be the Employee Your Company Can't Live Without: 18 Ways to Become Indispensable by Glenn Shepard

Point of Reflection

"Dependability is more important than talent. Dependability is a talent, and it is a talent all can have. It makes no difference how much ability we possess if we are not responsible and dependable." Floy L. Bennett

Building an Accountability Mindset

“If you ready to take your game to the next level, you gotta change that mindset.” Eric Thomas

According to David A. O’Brien, WorkChoice Solutions

What is an accountability mindset? Simply put, it’s a belief shared by all employees (regardless of level or title) that others are counting on us to go the extra mile to achieve a quality outcome. There are many factors that inhibit the accountability mindset but chief among them is lack of clarity about employer expectations. Clarity of expectations is not only a key driver of an accountability mindset but also a basic human motivator. Although clarifying expectations is often seen as a leadership responsibility, the reality is that this task is everyone’s responsibility. Despite this as leaders we need to ensure that all employees can easily answer such questions as:

- What are my key deliverables?
- Who am I responsible to?
- What is their desired outcome?
- What are my key timelines and milestones?
- What resources are available to assist me?
- Am I absolutely clear on what’s expected of me?

Seven Things You Can Do Now to Build an Accountability Mindset

1. Assess your leadership. As a leader, you set the climate for your team. Everything you do or don’t do impacts employee accountability and engagement at some level. How well do you model the behavior you want from your team?

2. Involve employees. Solicit input from your team about their view of accountability and what they think are the key actions that embody an accountability mindset. Also ask them to consider the actions and behaviors that inhibit an accountability mindset.

3. Show employees that you value them. Research shows that one of the chief influencers of motivation and engagement is feeling valued. You don’t need a complex program to show employees that you value them. Schedule 20 minutes of Leadership By Walking Around time on your calendar every week to let your team know that you’re there for them and that you care about how they’re doing.

4. Communicate clearly and frequently. Another key factor in building an accountability mindset is keeping your team informed about what is happening in the organization, especially around change. Beyond helping them to do their job with greater clarity and purpose, clear and frequent communication from you goes a long way in reducing or even eliminating the rumor mill.

5. Link each person’s role and contribution to the key goals of the organization. The more employees understand how their efforts impact the greater good of the group, the more likely they are to help foster an accountability mindset.

6. Give timely and specific feedback. No one knowingly chooses to fail. People need feedback in order to improve their performance. Make sure your feedback helps and motivates them to improve while also reinforcing the accountability mindset behaviors.

7. Emphasize continuous improvement. Acknowledge that personal leadership and the accountability mindset is part of a learning continuum that through time and commitment allows us to achieve greater job impact and greater job satisfaction.

Suggested Reading

Change the Culture, Change the Game: The Breakthrough Strategy for Energizing Your Organization and Creating Accountability for Results by Roger Connors, and Tom Smith

Point of Reflection

“The simple act of paying positive attention to people has a great deal to do with productivity.” Tom Peters

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