

# BUILDING ACCOUNTABILITY



Measure it and they'll do it. Add a reward, and they'll do it with commitment and enthusiasm.

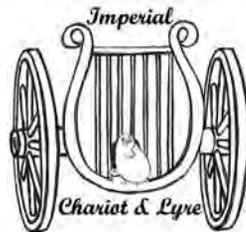
## Objectives For This Section:

- to understand why accountability is a cornerstone of safety excellence
- to understand the basic components of an accountability system
- to choose appropriate activities for different job functions within an organization
- to know what the different job functions within an organization should be accountable for
- to be able to build an evidence-based accountability system that effectively rewards workers for the desired outcomes



## CHAPTER 10

# THE BASICS OF ACCOUNTABILITY



## WELCOME TO THE CHARIOT DIVISION...

When Hans was jolted from sleep at 2 AM by an Imperial Messenger, he knew the news wasn't going to be good.

"Accident," the messenger gasped. "The Emperor... summons you...."

As the messenger's chariot raced them back to the castle, Hans bombarded the man with questions, but the messenger knew nothing.

Hans hoped fervently that it wasn't the Helmet Division. In the month since the foundry workers had started their intervention, the entire Helmet Division's LTA rate had dropped so fast that the Emperor, against Hans's advice, had raced over to the Senate to rub Snarth Hader's nose in the results. Hans fervently hoped that it wasn't the Helmet Division.

The imperial audience room was deserted. Outside the high latticed windows, the landscape lay peaceful in the moonlight—the muted furnace-glow of the helmet factory, the low, square outline of the lyre works, the ostrich pens, the tall headframes of the mining/smelting complex—and a gaping, smoking ruin where the chariot warehouse had stood. In the moonlight, Hans could see random clumps of debris scattered around the warehouse yard.

"They blew up the chariot warehouse?" he cried in disbelief.

When he got out to the accident site, Hans saw with relief that the damage wasn't as bad



as it looked from the castle – one end of the warehouse had been destroyed, but the far wing still stood.

Near the smoking ruins, the silhouette of a woman watched a fire brigade hose down charred timbers.

“One man burned, but no fatalities,” the silhouette said, as Hans approached.

“Greta?” he said. “Is that you?”

“Yup.”

“I didn’t know you managed this division, too.”

“As of last week,” she said. “The Emperor transferred me. Said I did such a great job in the Helmet Division...” She gestured at the smoking ruins. “Some reward, hey?”

In spite of himself, Hans laughed. *No fatalities*. What a relief.

“I’ve been trying to get the Behaviour stuff started here,” Greta said. “Maybe you can lend a hand.”

“Happy to,” Hans said. Then he caught sight of Supervisicus, wandering along the edge of the ruins.

“Hi, Supervisicus,” he called out. “You get transferred too?”

The man gave him a blank look.

“No, no,” Greta whispered quickly. “That’s Supervisicus-2, not Supervisicus-1.”

“Supervisicus-2?”

“They’re Quints,” Greta said. “Quintuplets, all identical. Four of them are supervisors here. The fifth... Well, anyway, you worked with Supervisicus-1. This is Supervisicus-2.”

“One and Two?” Hans said dubiously. “Don’t they have names?”

Greta gave a small grimace. “The Emperor says to use numbers. Otherwise he gets confused.”

“Mm. Sounds sort of like ‘Thing 1’ and ‘Thing 2’ to me.”

“Excuse me?”

“Nothing.” Hans walked over to the man. “Hello Super-2. I’m Hans Preventicus, the new safety officer.”

“Hey, Boy-O. How ya doin’?” Super-2 pumped his hand vigorously. “Slick little mess we got ourselves here, huh?”

“What happened, anyway?”

“Well, you got your one guy cleaning with some ammonia cleaner, and you got your other gal cleaning with some bleach. Danged if they didn’t go and pour ‘em down the floor drain about a few seconds too close.”

“Didn’t anybody train them not to mix the two?” Hans said in disbelief.

“Maybe,” Super-2 said. “I don’t rightly recall.”

“Don’t you have any records?” Hans said.

“Records?” Super-2 said. “Like them little flat things that play music?”

“Training records. To see if the task was assigned to anyone and whether they actually did it and when.”

Super-2 looked at him with amazement. “Now what would I go writin’ that kind of stuff down for? I got chariots to produce here, Boy-O.”



## WHAT'S ACCOUNTABILITY?

*Accountable:* likely to be called to account; answerable  
*Accountability:* The state of being accountable

Accountability is what gets things done.

Safety programs have historically been very good at telling us who's responsible for safety. It's right there in the legislation: you, as an employer, are responsible for the safety of workers. You, as a worker, are responsible for the health & safety of yourself and others.

Safety good! Okay, I get it. (Doh!) I understand the concept. I'm responsible. But what does that *mean*, and how do I *do* it? That's the question that most employers have – how do I *meet* my responsibilities? What do I need to *do*?

What you need to do is hold yourself and your employees accountable for safety.

Accountability is more than responsibility. You can be responsible for something, but if no one checks to see if you actually did it, then you're not being held accountable. Accountability means that you are both *responsible* for doing something and *answerable* for doing it to an acceptable standard.

If nobody holds you and your employees accountable for safety – or if you're only held accountable when things go badly – then your company is not *managing* anything. You're passively waiting for the disaster to happen, and then you're going to look for someone or something to blame. And when you do blame some poor subordinate, what you'll probably hear is, "How was I supposed to know it was important? Did you ever let me know it was important? The last time you talked to me about this was last year... you never even checked to see if I did it."



Accountability is the motivator that makes people *do* things about occupational health and safety. Meeting your OH&S responsibilities is about holding yourself and others accountable. (Does the word *consequences* come to mind? Just checking!)

All right, now that you're up to speed on the definition of accountability, let's start seeing how it can help out the folks at IC&L....

## HOW ACCOUNTABILITY MAKES A DIFFERENCE

*"The buck stops here."*

Motto of Harry S. Truman

Ask a line manager what his or her company is doing to control production, and you'll get specific answers. You'll be told what the company does to plan production, manage production, measure results, and reward performance. You'll get specific answers because people are being held accountable for production. As a result, production is being managed, and everyone knows what to do to create the desired outcome.

Now ask that same line manager what the company does to ensure and promote safety. Probably what you'll hear is... "Uhhhh...we give out safety awards once a year."

Gong!!!!

As Stephen Covey would say, "Success leaves clues." When I want to know where new clients are with respect to safety, I ask management four simple questions:

1. what did you do today to make safety more likely?
2. what did your subordinates do today to make safety more likely?
3. how did you measure how well they did it?
4. how did you reward them for doing it?

The answers tell me, with a high degree of certainty, how safe that company is. The reason is simple: if you're managing safety, actively and consciously managing it—then you can describe what you're doing to manage it. You can tell me what activities you have around it, and how you hold people accountable for those activities.

Invariably, in companies that are world leaders in safety, everyone from the CEO on down can tell me what they're *doing* about safety. It's on their radar screen, and you can bet that they have accountability systems. But in companies where I ask my four questions and they give me a blank stare and don't know what to say, I know they are not managing safety. There is no accountability system to guide people's actions and produce the desired result.

Most things that go wrong in safety, go wrong because nobody was held accountable.

*Accountability tells people what is important.* If you, as a supervisor, don't take the time to make your subordinates accountable for a safety task or problem, then in the eyes of your subordinates, the issue is not important. Unless you establish accountability, you send a clear message that there are no predictable consequences or standards of behaviour around the issue. Ergo, you are not managing the issue.

I'll repeat it till it annoys you: assigning responsibility alone is not enough. Responsibility without accountability does not get things done. If you don't believe me, imagine this: you tell an employee, "You're responsible for production and cost-cutting, and I want to know on a daily basis what you're doing about each of them – and oh, by the way, you're responsible for filling the fire extinguishers too." You've given this person three tasks, and announced that they will be held accountable for *two* of them. When the employee gets short of time, which task do you think will get skipped? Bingo. The fire extinguishers.

In a perfect world, we'd all have unlimited time and money. In the real world, every worker, at every level in the organization, is short of time and resources. Accountability tells people what's important. If people are held accountable for some tasks but not for safety, safety will always suffer.

Ergo: if you want safety, you need an effective safety accountability system.



### ACCOUNTABILITY FROM A QUALITY CONTROL POINT OF VIEW

When Deming asked how you could possibly build a great car without perfecting all the parts that go into a car, people said, "Oh, of course! We get it." It makes total sense that you can only control the quality of the output by controlling the inputs.

Perfect Pieces = Perfect Car  
 What You Do = What You Get

OH&S is no different. How can anyone expect to have a safe place to work, a place where nobody gets hurt, without paying attention to the inputs that go to produce that?

Safe Components = Safe Result  
 What You Do = What You Get

Once you understand this, the need for an Accountability system is immediately clear. If nobody is held accountable for doing the things that lead to safety, how can you possibly create safety? Without accountability, the entire process is left to chance.

### Accountability Fishbone Diagram

