How to remain accountable at work in the age of entitlement

The genesis of the two "Es" started some generations ago - entitlement and expectation. One might (still) blame the millennials but somehow, these culture mindsets have found and wound their way from wider generational shifts in attitudes and action to a place where they simply don't belong: the office.

Kerry Morris, CEO of The Tower Group

Fresh-out-of-uni earners and first-time employees are stepping through the door and onto career rungs with the misguided belief that simply showing up is enough: that you "deserve" the perks without the work; the promotion without the performance. But, the brutal truth is that when it comes to real success for employees, leaders and companies, the only "E" that is welcome and warranted is how you "earn" it.

"The only thing entitlement and expectation are earning is a bad rap," says Kerry Morris, CEO of specialist recruitment agency, The Tower Group.

Reported as a regular HR headache amongst industry players, Morris says that employees – specifically from a younger cohort – enter the job market with an attitude of entitlement that perpetuates a difficult, ineffective and unhealthy work culture for leaders to manage, and for team members alike, to learn from.

This idea of "you owe me" results in employees expecting to receive something (or everything) in return for putting little, less, or nothing in. The attitude of expectation starts as early as learners arriving to their internship and expecting a free lunch on the job, or expecting their facilitator to spoon feed the assignment. Before long, entitlement and expectation replace sound work ethic and integrity.

"For as long as it is accepted in industry, 'entitlement' will become the norm – and it's not okay anymore," says Morris.

According to Morris, a company's culture should be a level playing field where employees and leaders seek to be accountable before being entitled. "This me-me-me mindset creates obstruction and conflict amongst leaders and employees, amongst employees and employees, and ultimately becomes the demise of the company's common goal; our leaders and employees need to adopt an emotional intelligence that sees them owning their roles and their responsibilities; owning their follow-throughs, their decisions, their triumphs and their failures. Essentially this is how you scale a business, and too often it is overlooked," says Morris.

When it comes to harnessing an accountable work culture, who is responsible? In a [Gallup](#) data survey reported by [Monday.com,](#) 25% of leaders believe that 10% to 20% of their workers avoid accountability, while 84% of employees blamed the behaviour of their leaders as the single most important factor influencing accountability in their organisations – so just where does the responsibility of 'the responsibility' lie?

"The onus sits with every individual in a company. No matter your title or rank, everyone remains accountable for their behaviour, their decisions and their overall part in the firm, and that leaves no room for an entitled environment," says Morris.

Morris goes on to advocate an 'Act to Earn' modality of culture in the workplace; one where 'action' equals 'earned values' such as respect and promotion. For leaders seeking to instill an accountable work culture, the 'Act to Earn' principles serve as a guiding tool in equipping teams with an ownership mindset; one that matters not only to the success of a project or company, but equally so, to the shaping of an individual into a better version of themselves.

"Act to Earn should not just be viewed as a set of principles, it must become a way of work, and should thereby be adopted early enough in a team, in order to allow comradery and trust to build, automatically," says Morris.

Act to Earn – every worker's guide to building an accountable work culture:

A is for Always-in

For both leader and employee, cultivating an always-in mindset delivers confidence amongst team players, as well as trust and excitement amongst collaborators. Additionally, this idea of 'always-in' creates optimism against adversity and a sense of continued leadership that others in the organisation can learn from and look up to.

An Always-in approach looks like this:

- Taking initiative on projects out of your scope.
- Being optimistic and not resistant.
- Taking responsibility for your actions.
- Stepping up and into your role and your responsibilities.
- Embracing critical feedback.
- Acknowledging the skills gaps that could benefit your career and/or people skills.
- Communicating your ideas, plans and objectives clearly - and thrice over, to allow an accountability culture to grow and thrive.

C is for Communication

Cultivating a sense of community at work and communicating how the company walks and talks is crucial to cultivating an

accountable culture.

This is achieved by:

- Clearly communicating company values and expectations to anyone who joins the firm. From recruitment to onboarding to resignation and retirement – it's important that everyone understands and upholds the business' culture and values.
- Keeping your values top-of-mind and alive helps to deliver effective feedback for when a team member behaves inconsistently; or needs to be held accountable for their actions.
- Creating a sense of community amongst your team goes a long way to encourage an "us" mentality.

T is for Transparent Ownership

Each and every leader and employee is responsible for showing up for their own success. There are no short-cuts and no quick fixes – and no brownie points for keeping trade secrets too close to the heart.

Enabling this collective mindset starts when you:

- Own your impact on others.
- Own your misjudgments and mistakes.
- Say you're sorry.
- Commit to the work and stick to that commitment.
- Share your knowledge and skills with team members to avoid defaulting into 'silo-mentality'.
- Remind yourself and your team that shared knowledge is shared success – don't be afraid to share what you own. This is how everyone wins.

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