

## **Promoting Self-Responsibility** by Linda Hanson, CMC

In a business environment plagued by corporate financial scandals and concerns for the ethics of many firms it is not surprising that many small business owners want to ensure ethical employee behavior.

A leader's job is to recognize when a company is headed in the wrong direction and to get it back on the right track. Behavior is the most difficult of all things to change because it involves altering the ingrained behavior of people. Within companies behavioral differences are present between departments, within departments and sometimes between the CEO and senior executives.

Small business owners can build the correct employee behaviour by modelling it. How? By taking responsibility for what happens, acting to correct problems, and doing the right thing despite the opinions of others. In other words, promoting self-responsibility.

So how do you promote self-responsibility amongst your employees? First, ask yourself how well you do at taking responsibility. Next develop the following traits to promote self-responsibility and be a strong leader:

1. **Be Authentic** --A certain amount of ego is needed to lead but be strong enough to check it at the door. Being a leader is not about yourself it's about the people around you. --Earn the trust and respect of the people who you lead. Know who you are and walk the talk.
2. **Control your responses.** Stuff happens. You can't control everything but you can control your response to what happens which will determine the outcome. Don't blame others; instead look for what you can do to achieve the best outcome.
3. **Listen carefully**-- Listen to everything the person has to say, without interruption and without tuning out their point of view. Don't multi-task when people are talking to you. Great listening is also fueled by curiosity. Curiosity helps you ask questions—just don't believe you have all the answers.
4. **Give Encouragement**--Leaders are always raising the stakes for themselves and their people. That means they're always testing and building both courage and stamina throughout the organization. Give frequent feedback to ensure employees understand how they are doing and what is expected of them.
5. **Provide Direction**-- Tell employees where the company is going this year, what the mission and vision are, and clearly convey what is expected of each employee. Providing direction is different than having all the answers. It means asking revealing questions, knowing where markets are going, how technology is changing, what competitors are plotting so you can be in touch and out front. You can't force others to behave a certain way but you can clearly express your expectations and require them to act responsibly or pay the penalties. Remember

- that lecturing and punishing doesn't work. In other words, reward people who take responsibility.
6. **Expose People to Reality**--Even though people want leaders to insulate them from change, it is better to mobilize them to face it so they can grow and develop.
  7. **Stand For Values**--Reinforce the values and operations that are so central to your core that if you lose them, you lose yourself. Help people identify what habits and assumptions must be changed for the company to prosper.
  8. **Lead by Example**--Small gestures send big messages. Leaders have a fundamental obligation to live their lives according to the principles they espouse. If you want others to behave differently, you must engage in the right type of behavior so people will do the same. If you yell at your employees, they will yell at their employees
  9. **Make More Leaders**--Look around your organization and ensure you see enough leaders at all levels to keep your company changing and moving forward. Your task is to make more leaders.
  10. **Hire right.** You can't change other people's behaviour to a large degree but you can create an environment to nurture the type of behavior you want. Begin by hiring people with the right work competencies, lead by example and do not accept deviations from that behavior.

Teaching others to take responsibility for their actions is not about fixing people. It takes time to get to the root of the problem and ultimately self-responsibility comes from inside the person. But, being self-responsible and promoting it within your company is a mandatory leadership trait.

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