# 💬 WORDS ON WISE MANAGEMENT

## Creating a culture of accountability: 5 best practices

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When I was a teenager, I wanted to start smoking, so I approached my father and asked him what he thought. His response was very interesting. He said, "You don't want to know what I think." I responded, "Yes I do." As my father insisted that I didn't really care what he thought, I attempted to convince him that I did and asked him why he felt that way. His answer was the perfect response.

My father said I already knew how he felt about smoking because he didn't smoke. Clearly, I already had the answer to my question; therefore, I must have been asking for a different reason. He argued that the reason I was asking was to justify my decision to smoke. He went on to say that I was setting a trap for him: Regardless of his answer, I was going to use it to justify starting to smoke. If he answered that he didn't like smoking, that would give me the excuse to rebel and start, but if he said it was OK, then I would have permission to start.

As a result, he decided not to answer my question. Instead, he told me it was a big decision, and I needed to make it myself. He added that I would have to live with the consequences, positive or negative. Then he left me alone to make the decision. And, guess what? I didn't start smoking. The main reason was that I had to take responsibility for my decision and its repercussions.

The role my father took isn't very different from the role of a manager. Managers have to make choices every day:

- Do I make the decision for my employees, or do I let them make it themselves?

- Do I lead them where I want them to go, or do I let them figure it out?

- Do I save them from the consequences of their choices, or do I use the consequences as a feedback mechanism and a learning tool?

- Do I let them use me as a crutch, or do I encourage real ownership?

If you want a team of problem solvers who accept accountability, here are five best practices you can put into action:

(1) **Raise the flag.** All too often, problems repeat and persist over time because no one ever says anything. Before you can solve a problem, you have to name it. Encourage your team to live the model: If you see something, say something. Don't discourage people from bringing up problems they observe.

(2) **Own it.** Reward your people for solving problems. Recognize them for taking ownership. Leadership means allowing no room for apathy. Leadership means moving people from "It's not my job" to "I own it." When you have too many volunteers to solve a problem, you know you have a team that owns it.

(3) **Ask yourself "Why?"** Are you truly solving the problem or putting a bandage on it? Are you serving your ego or the organization, the team, and the customer? Think before you act. Self-awareness is one of the central tenets to being accountable.

(4) **Build your network.** Solving problems is a collaborative process. You'll need the expertise of others and their buy in. To be productive, you'll need to develop an internal network within your organization and an external network outside your organization. You'll need to tap into an emotional component to drive people to action.

(5) **Raise expectations.** Set your own expectations high, and your people will follow. Role modeling is paramount. When you reach for the stars, you inspire others.

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