

CROSSING THE LINE?

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Today's headlines. Wall Street financier Bernard Madoff orchestrates \$50 billion fraud. Qwest CEO Joe Nacchio charged with lying to shareholders. SEC charges former Countrywide Financial CEO Angelo Mozilo, COO David Sambol, and CFO Eric Sieracki with securities fraud for misleading investors about the company's credit risks. U.S. auto companies receive billions in government bail-out money. Global markets stunned by unexpected Lehman Brothers collapse. Adelphia Communications CEO John Rigas loots corporate coffers and conceals billions in debt.

We have an accountability problem in this country and we need to fix it before we can expect things to get better. *Time* magazine's list of "25 to Blame for the Financial Crisis"—Angelo Mozillo, Phil Gramm, Alan Greenspan, Chris Cox, American Consumers, Hank Paulson, Joe Casano, Ian McCarthy, Frank Raines, Marion and Herb Sandle, Bernie Madoff, to name a few... —may attempt to serve justice and set history straight, but it won't solve our individual, organizational, national or global accountability problems. So, what must we do? The answer is disarmingly simple: become more accountable by vigilantly avoiding the blame game and the cycle of victimization that accompanies it.

A thin line separates success

from failure, the great companies from the ordinary ones. Below that line lies excuse making, blaming others, confusion, and an attitude of helplessness. Above that line we find a sense of reality, ownership, commitment, solutions to problems, and determined action. Whenever people or organizations avoid accountability, consciously or unconsciously, they get stuck Below The Line in what we call the victim cycle, where they immediately begin to lose their spirit and resolve, until, eventually, they feel completely powerless. If they stay Below The Line, unaware or unconscious of reality, things only get worse, not better, without anyone knowing why. Rather than face reality, sufferers of this "victim" condition oftentimes begin ignoring or pretending not to know about their accountability, denying their responsibility, blaming others for their predicament, citing confusion as a reason for inaction, asking others to tell them what to do, claiming that they can't do it, or just waiting to see if the situation will miraculously resolve itself. Only by moving Above The Line and taking the steps that lead to greater accountability can they become powerful again.

Accountability for results rests at the core of every major business issue—innovation, customer satisfaction, competitive advantage,

team performance, corporate governance and continuous improvement. Why? Because the essence of these issues boils down to getting people to rise above their circumstances and do whatever it takes (within the bounds of ethical behavior) to get the results they and the organization want. This message strikes a chord with people in every walk of life, as we document in our first book, *The Oz Principle*. Here, we provide what we think readers have found to be a compelling case for capturing the power of positive accountability that helps people at every level of an organization to assume full accountability for the circumstances and finding ways to solve the problems they face.

Of course, all of us, at one time or another, fall Below The Line, succumbing to the urge to take ourselves off the hook with one excuse or another: "I didn't have enough time," "If we only had the resources," "The schedule is too tight," "That's not my job," "It's the boss's fault," "I didn't know," "The competition outsmarted us," "The whole economy's in trouble," "Things will get better tomorrow." Whatever the reason, all our justifications for failure focus on "why it can't be done," rather than on "what else I can do," to drive results. To be sure, people really do fall victim every day to manipulating bosses, unscrupulous

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competitors, conniving colleagues, economic calamities, and all manner of liars, cheats, and predators. Things do happen to people over which they have little or no control. Sometimes, people do not deserve what happens to them because they did not contribute to it nor are they legitimately accountable for it. But even in the worst of such circumstances, people can't move forward if they just sit around feeling powerless and blaming others for their misery. Regardless of the situation, you cannot even begin to turn things around until you take charge of your circumstances and accept your own responsibility for better results in the future. You must get Above The Line.

If our current economic crisis has taught us anything, it is that individual accountability should never be eclipsed, removed or weakened by a lack of accountability in an organization's executive suite or society's corridors of power. Neither individuals and organizations nor nations and societies can straddle the line between accountability and victimization for very long. Eventually, events and circumstances will work to push them Below The Line, where nothing constructive or positive can ever happen. Rising Above The Line is the only answer to our nation's and the world's accountability problem.

In our latest book, *How Did That Happen?* due out August 11th, we show readers how to hold other people accountable for results in a positive, principled way. Greater accountability is the answer to the problems facing individuals and

organizations today. *How Did That Happen?* is available at Amazon.com or wherever fine books are sold.

Roger Connors and Tom Smith are the authors of the bestselling books, The Oz Principle and Journey to the Emerald City, and Co-Presidents of Partners In Leadership, Inc., the worldwide leader in Accountability Training. ©2009 Partners In Leadership. Above The Line®, Below The Line®, How Did That Happen?®, The Oz Principle® are all Trademarks of Partners In Leadership.