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Unit 1

Taking responsibility at work

Working within defined responsibilities

What does it mean to work within defined responsibilities? We know that job roles refer to a person's position on a team, while job responsibilities describe the exact tasks that fit with a specific role. For example, if you are a sales manager, then sales manager is your job role. Bringing new business to your company with the support of the sales team will be one of your job responsibilities.

For individual employees, defining your roles and responsibilities, either right from Day One or even during your interview process, gives you an understanding of what exactly the job entails and what is expected. Being clear about and sticking within the limits of your roles and responsibilities can be nourishing to the organization. In the first place, it helps to build and maintain good relationships among colleagues who might otherwise think you are stepping on their toes. Further, one tends to perform poorly when wearing extra hats. For instance, making cold calls may not be in the job description of car engineers. Doing it anyway will not make the engineers any better at it but distract their attention away from regular duties. Only when everyone in a business, from the CEO to a customer service representative, plays his or her own part, can the

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organization be run in an effective and healthy way.

What if one fails to work within defined responsibilities? You may get some clues from the story of Rebecca.

Rebecca was a workplace newbie. She was hired as a library staff member at a city branch. During the first week, in order to showcase her competence and diligence, although given a detailed introduction of the duties she was assigned, Rebecca left aside those responsibilities and instead kept seeking other jobs she could do. For example, she came up with a new way to arrange DVDs. She made a recommended list of children's books for the library to purchase. At the end of this week, Rebecca was called into the boss's office. She thought with certainty she would be praised by her boss because of her hard work. Yet, contrary to her expectations, her boss expressed disappointment with her job performance.

So, here are the tips for working within your defined responsibility:

- Identify your responsibilities. Make sure you're fully aware of your role and duties. You can talk to your manager or co-workers to better understand the extent of your duties. Focus on completing your tasks to the best of your ability.
- Perform your tasks. Complete your current tasks promptly before taking up additional ones or helping others. It's always a good idea to set deadlines so you are more likely to hold yourself accountable by encouraging yourself to achieve each goal on time.
- Evaluate your progress. It's essential to evaluate the progress of your goals regularly. Make sure you set practical and achievable deadlines to prevent unnecessary stress.

Taking initiative

As a future employee, probably, do you know what taking initiative means? Simply put, it means being proactive and taking action on your own without someone telling you what to do. It involves stepping up, solving problems, and making decisions without waiting for instructions. It shows that you are motivated, resourceful, and willing to do more than just your assigned tasks.

The most frequent complaint I hear from leaders is that they would like the members of their team to assume more responsibility for the organization and initiate ideas and actions on their own. They don't want to be the only ones leading. So, knowing how to take more initiative can be an excellent learning experience and may align you with further opportunities for advancement. That is the case with Amy.

Amy didn't like being asked to do extra things as she wasn't paid for them. However, a professional development workshop changed her perspective on the situation. Instead of "feeling forced" to do something, she decided to look at it from the perspective of opportunity and impact on her future. She decided she wanted to try a different approach to her job responsibilities, which yielded great results.

Amy's company had a big marketing launch two weeks away and she hadn't really been involved in the preparation project. The boss was working with a lot of people from different groups and one of them invited Amy to a meeting about sending an important invitation email. During the meeting, she was asked from time to

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time what her group wanted and what they should do. So, Amy started telling them what she thought they should do. She also promised to follow up on a number of items and track down some answers. As a result, regular conference calls were initiated, with Amy actively contributing to the discussions. Throughout this process, Amy kept updating her boss by email and a couple of weekly one-on-one meetings.

The project went really well and the launch was a big hit. Amy worked a lot of extra hours but didn't seem to mind this time. She really enjoyed her part of leading. Plus, she got some good face time with her boss's boss! The big boss was so pleased with her work that she sent Amy a wonderful email of appreciation and a small spot bonus! Amy felt the opportunity kind of fell into her lap but she fought her urge to push back and decided to show her ability to take initiative and solve problems.

Story time's up. Here are some takeaways you may find useful if you attempt to take more initiative at work.

- Change your mindset. When you feel overwhelmed, stretched, or way out of your comfort zone, shift your internal dialogue from “Why is work so hard?” to “It's okay for work to be hard.” Embrace the challenge as it means that your capabilities are being built.

- Start small. You don't need to formulate an entire plan to improve the organization; just bring up something simple. Finding a better supplier for the same materials might make a huge difference. Or, you may speak up more during meetings and ask questions whenever you need to.

- Always be prepared. Opportunities can introduce themselves at any given point. To catch them at the right moment, you need to be aware of everything happening at your organization and keep organized at all times.

Stopping passing the buck

Have you heard the phrase “pass the buck”? It originated from a poker game where a marker or counter was used to indicate the dealer. The marker was called a buck because it was originally made from a buckhorn. The buck was passed to the next player when the dealer changed, which can be seen as transferring the role of the dealer to someone else, thereby avoiding the responsibility and potential consequences associated with that role. So, the phrase later became a metaphor for shifting the blame or avoiding accountability.

Passing the buck at work can have very negative consequences for the organization. It can create a blame culture where people are afraid to admit their mistakes, take risks, or learn from feedback. Also, it can damage trust, lower work efficiency, and eventually hinder the growth and development of both the employees and the leaders. So, we have seen many leaders advocating not passing the buck. However, it isn't just leaders who should take responsibility for their decisions. Each of us must take ownership of our work as well. A simple truth, right? However, Jennifer has learned it the hard way.

It was on August 2, 1990. Jennifer was standing in her lounge room in Perth, Australia when the radio announced the Gulf War.

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At the moment of the announcement, the bombs started dropping and the Suez Canal was closed. You may go, “So what? She lived in Perth.” But it was a big so-what for Jennifer. She was an importer of hydroponic hardware at that time and she brought them from Hamburg, Germany to Fremantle, Australia through the Suez Canal. It took 4 to 5 weeks for a container to get from Hamburg to Fremantle before the war. Now it was going to take 16 to 20 weeks. She couldn’t get enough money to fund her supply line, didn’t have any product to sell, and the stock ran out in less than 60 days.

Here’s the kicker though. Jennifer’s husband actually warned her the year before, which was previous to the Christmas of 1989. He said, “Jennifer, you need to do something.” However, Jennifer replied with all her arrogance, “It’ll be all right. We’re good. You wait.” She dismissed him and shut him down. And when it actually hit, she had tons of excuses, “Well, I’m not responsible and I’m not to blame for geopolitics. It’s not my fault. I can’t control them.”

Have you ever had those moments when you were going to pay? I’m sure you all had your own “Gulf War,” the thing that you deliberately dismissed because you were not willing to engage in it. For Jennifer, it was devastating.

To stop passing the buck, here are some tips that can help you:

- Be honest and admit your mistakes. You should understand it’s completely normal that things go wrong on the job. Don’t blame others or make excuses for your failures. Instead, focus on finding solutions and learning from your errors.

- Be proactive and respond quickly. Try to get in front of the situation before it spirals. Stepping up with suggestions for solutions to issues when they arise demonstrates your problem-solving abilities.
- Be open-minded and attentive. Do not react impulsively or defensively when you receive advice or suggestions, even if they make you uncomfortable. Appreciate different perspectives and think about how they can benefit you.

Spreading positive vibes

As an employee, you need to be accountable for your own duties. Some people can do very well when they are alone; however, they contribute little to a team. Being a team member will add an extra dimension to one's responsibilities. Once you become part of a team, you should work collaboratively with your colleagues as a functioning unit toward common goals and objectives. With that being said, it is quite difficult to practice it in reality. Teams made up of employees who have very different personalities and business philosophies can give off unpleasant work vibes. It could be a naysayer who criticizes or turns down every idea, a savage who uses offensive language and lacks respect for others, or a dominator who seeks control over every aspect of group activities.

Abigail once lived the nightmare. She led a team of exceptional people who worked well together to accomplish their goals. However, one person, Jim, dragged the whole team down. Jim was the kind of person who interpreted the shared responsibility of

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teamwork as “everyone else is responsible.” He consistently missed deadlines. When asked why, he pointed the finger at one of his teammates, instead of admitting that his own procrastination caused him to fail. What’s more, he loved to whine about the company, workloads, projects, and basically everything. Jim’s behavior had a significant negative impact. People didn’t want to work with him. Obviously, no one likes a diva who screws up the entire team effort, and they resented his toxic attitude and his unwillingness to change.

It didn’t take long for Abigail to realize that Jim was like “a virus.” So, she took action before other people got infected as well. She told him how his attitude was affecting the whole group but with sensitivity and respect. Fortunately, they worked together and managed to get things right.

Spreading positive vibes in a team is not easy, but here are some tips for you to change on a daily basis:

- Prioritize team goals. Always put the team’s needs before your own. While diversity bestows benefits on a workforce, once your team decides on a plan of action, that plan becomes your plan and your responsibility is to help your team with that plan.

- Play your role. You should know what’s expected of you and how your role fits within the team. Also, it’s your obligation to help people understand what you can deliver as a member and to stick to the deadlines of assigned tasks.

- Be nice to co-workers. Respect others, appreciate their work, and offer help when needed. If you make it a regular thing, it’ll become a cycle of generosity and happiness. This, in turn, will make the whole team feel good, thus avoiding emotional conflicts.