

Responsibility & Accountability

Responsibility and accountability are two terms that are often considered synonymous and are used interchangeably. However, they actually have very distinct meanings. It is important to understand the differences between responsibility vs accountability.

The definition for responsibility is “the state or fact of having a duty to deal with something or of having control over someone.” While the definition for accountability is “the quality or state of being accountable especially an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions.”

While responsibility refers to someone's duty to conduct a task to completion, accountability generally refers to what happens after something has happened. Accountability is therefore concerned with the consequences of someone's actions, rather than their initial duty or responsibility to carry these actions out.

Responsibility is essentially the duty to respond to and complete tasks and can be divided up among several people. Every team member may be responsible for completing their portion of a project, and once the project has been completed, they either did their task or didn't.

Responsibility is divided among roles and often defines job descriptions and policies or procedures that are in place to achieve an end result. If someone fails at their responsibility, it may impact the success (or failure) of the final outcome, but it likely isn't the determining factor.

The responsible people in a situation aren't necessarily the ones held accountable at the end of the day - they are the people who need to get to work and get the job done.

Accountability is often associated with negative words such as “consequences” and “wrongdoing.” However, having accountability certainly isn't a negative thing - especially if you work with integrity, clarity, and a sense of personal responsibility.



When you have accountability, you're willing to accept responsibility for your actions and outcomes - both positive and negative. This means you can live up to your commitments and keep your promises, which can only take place after a result has occurred. But genuine leaders are willing to take the risk to hold themselves accountable for outcomes even in uncertain times.

Being accountable is an empowering trait - it's not consequential. Accountability must be accepted by someone for them to take ownership of the task; it's not something that can be delegated. However, once accountability is accepted, that person can delegate tasks and responsibilities to other people.

Seeing as it's a personal trait, people aren't accountable just once or twice in their lives. This is a personal characteristic that you possess (or you don't). People who duck out on being held accountable for their actions are the same as those who don't accept personal responsibility and are always looking for a chance to get out of the spotlight.

By avoiding taking responsibility at every chance, they can avoid being blamed if something goes wrong - but are also missing the chance of accepting credit when things go right.

When responsibility and accountability are used interchangeably, it can lead to a culture of blame, disengagement, and poor performance because everyone ends up passing the buck off to someone else.

Now that we have defined both responsibility and accountability, let's summarize the key differences.

| <u>Responsibility</u> | <u>Accountability</u> |
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| The duty to complete tasks; not doing so is a failure of responsibility | The duty to give an account of tasks after they are completed |
| Ongoing while final goal is being worked towards | Happens after a situation occurs (or in the form of status update) |
| Can be shared among a team; many people can have the same task, or different tasks that work towards the same goal | Should be assigned to just one person to avoid thinking someone else will be doing the job |
| Specifically task-focused | Specifically results-focused |
| Cannot be assigned to someone. Each person must take responsibility on their own (more behavioral) | Is assigned (ideally to one person) – they are held accountable for results and potential consequences of not reaching desired results |

People who accept accountability for an outcome seek feedback from others and act upon the advice they get. They look for other people's perspectives to be able to answer their constant question of, "What else could I do?"

However, those who are simply responsible for a task typically just want to get it completed so they can check that box. They aren't interested in improving or developing their performance in any way because it won't impact them in the long run.

The only feedback that those with responsibility get is typically in the form of reviews, and they're likely to only get corrected when they do something wrong rather than be encouraged to continue when they're doing something right.

When you accept accountability for yourself, you recognize that change begins and ends with you. You can only improve your life through self-discipline, and if you want to see some type of change, you have to pursue it. You have to commit to success without waiting for other factors to fall into place. You have to learn how to take a step back to analyze your mindset and determine if your own thoughts may be holding you back.

When you hold yourself accountable, you don't see yourself as a victim of your circumstances. Instead, you own your actions and your outcomes. You commit to working every day to accomplish your goals.

When you take accountability for your personal life, you can accept responsibility for your actions and your current situation in life. The best way to encourage accountability and responsibility is to build trust and highlight the behaviors you want to see whether in your personal life or the workplace. Provide measurable metrics to measure the progress of goals and objectives and provide timely feedback on performance.

Accepting personal accountability in your personal life can help you create significant and lasting changes in your life. You will be able to live the life you want without relying on or waiting for other people to do their part.

America! What a great place to live.

Thanks, Semper Fi, and Stay Safe !

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