

THE ACHIEVEMENT CULTURE: PROMISE'S PROMISE'S

Authors: Carolyn Taylor & Lynn Pearce

Imagine a world where everyone did what they said they would do, when they said they would do it.

Imagine a world where promises were made consciously – and kept!

What would it be like with that seemingly simple little difference? What would your relationships be like? What would you be like if your word was your bond and excuses were not an option? What would your business be like? What would it be like to leave that Monday morning meeting and KNOW that everything discussed was going to be done?

This is the power and transformational quality of a promise made and kept. This is the power of Accountability. Many people talk of accountability in the workplace yet few really take responsibility and ownership for ensuring that an accountability culture is fostered in an organisation. Like everything else in business someone has to be accountable for accountability and yet rarely is that the case. Instead “accountability” is relegated to the corporate jargon basket – pulled out from time to time to be used in the annual report, company meeting or director’s speech.

But accountability is not just some fluffy corporate concept – it is a systematic and consistent approach to business that inspires, motivates and empowers

individuals to create a desired outcome and positively impact the bottom line.

For some reason the whole concept of accountability has come to imply restriction, dictatorial style management, fear, consequences and other generally negative connotations. Yet in our experience the reality of an accountability culture couldn’t be further removed from that impression.

Time and time again we have seen teams truly pull together to achieve extraordinary results, we have seen whole organisations turned around in a matter of months, we have seen profitability, harmony and efficiency increase within an organisation. And we have watched previously cynical, uninspired workgroups experience the liberation of accountability and the personal and professional fulfillment that it can bring.

Accountability is really a very simple concept – asking for something to be done and being confident that it will be done. Being responsible and taking responsibility for that task until it is complete.

Yet our work has allowed us to observe just how many managers are struggling with this very issue - getting things done and holding people to account for that work. They are frustrated with their

inability to make things happen in their businesses. Frustrated at their lack of ability to get others to do what they said they would do. And frustrated at what they see as lack of commitment and drive by their people.

And this wasn't just contained to business – the same frustration was clearly expressed in the lives of our friends with their partners or with their children.

Why was it so bloody impossible to get a tradesman to turn up at 9am and complete the sundeck on your home? The same simple sundeck that would “take 3 weeks and be done in no time” that had now taken 3 months and was no-where near finished. Why did it seem impossible to get a colleague to complete section A of the report by Monday so that you could deliver the final document by Wednesday? Why did it always turn into a Broadway production whenever you wanted your partner to pick up dinner on the way home? And why did we think it was normal and almost acceptable to elect a government on the strength of the promise of income tax cuts and to still be waiting for those tax cuts two years later.

It was becoming very clear to me in all walks of life that getting other people to do what you want is just plain hard!

All of this led us to recognise that we could make a quantum impact on an organisation by teaching managers how people tick, and how to manage emotion and egos (their own and other peoples) in a way, and how to lead an achievement culture.

The Achievement Culture – Promise's Promise's

It didn't matter how sophisticated the systems were within the business or how polished the processes – if accountability is not part of the corporate culture - nothing will change.

We focused on how to get things done in a large corporate environment. How, for example, a CEO can develop a new strategy and then implement that strategy, quickly and seamlessly through a process that might ultimately involve thousands of people.

We were able to achieve these objectives but the results were not as consistent as we wanted. We realised that what we had never done in the past was actually break that down to the individual tasks that were required in order for change to take place. We had never really got to the bottom of what it really takes to create lasting change in an organisation.

What actually goes on between people when one is requiring another to undertake some task? Is it just a matter of asking? If so, why is it that so many things don't get done?

Because people are people and once you involve them in any process they will bring with them beliefs and attitudes through which they will filter their decisions and distort your business whether you like it or not.

The trick is to accept that reality and create protocols that have enough flexibility to allow everyone to know what is expected of them, yet not too rigid that people feel boxed in and stifled!



Walking the Talk has a reputation for getting to the heart of the matter to make things simple. We do this because we have found that complexity is more often used as a tool for ambiguity and procrastination. This ambiguity then sows the seeds for disappointment and frustration because everyone then walks away from a discussion with a different understanding of what is required.

So we looked to the heart of why people so often felt let down by each other. We found a set of principles, values, behaviours, and skills, which allows you to essentially create a duplicable system of accountability – regardless of ethics, values or intrinsic integrity of the individual team members.

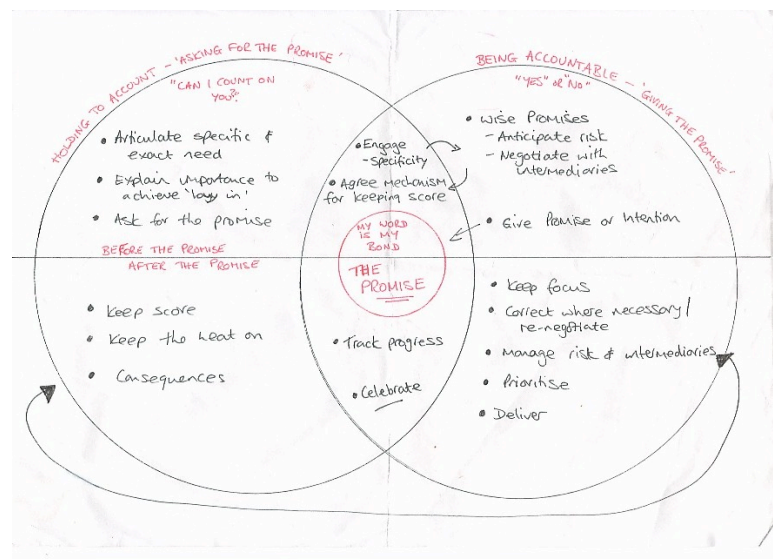
Our Achievement culture process will allow you to systemise the unsystemisable – human beings! And this will transform your life just as it transformed ours. What we found was extraordinarily empowering, exciting and liberating!

There is something incredibly powerful and thrilling about keeping promises. Being known as a person of your word, having the self-esteem that comes with making and keeping promises time and time again. It transforms businesses – we have seen it happen time and again to our clients and have witnessed it first hand in our own organisation.

THE DIAGRAM

Accountability and the phases of accountability can easily be represented in a diagrammatic form. This not only simplifies the concept but also serves as a

quick visual reference depending on what part in the accountability equation you happen to be in at any given time. The diagram is depicted as two interdependent circles for a couple of fundamental reasons. The first is that accountability is a series of interdependent loops between different people. For example it is necessary for person B to secure promises from person A before person B can themselves promise to person C. The other reason is that accountability is a contract between two people. You simply cannot be accountable on your own therefore there is always a phase in the accountability process where two people come together with their own individual needs and desires and negotiate the promise – hence the crossing over of the circles to indicate the phase which involves both parties.



The whole process starts in the top left-hand section of the diagram. This is the responsibility of the person asking for the promise. It is this person's responsibility to:

- Articulate specific and exact need
- Explain the importance of the request so as to engage the other

- person and achieve a buy-in of the promise.
- Ask for the promise

The two parties then come together to negotiate the feasibility of the request and agree on how the promise will be measured.

We then move onto the person who is being asked to give the promise. It is now their responsibility to make a wise promise or not. This is done by:

- Assessing the risk
- Negotiating with interdependencies

Depending on the outcome of that discussion and assessment the person must decide whether they can confidently make the promise. Are they prepared to promise or are they only prepared to make an intention, which is a declaration of commitment only?

Once the promise has been made we move below the line to the section after the promise. Here it is the main responsibility of the person who has made the promise to deliver on that commitment. To do this they must:

- Keep focus
- Correct where necessary and re-negotiate appropriately
- Manage the risk and interdependencies
- Prioritize
- Deliver

It is the responsibility of both parties to track the progress and keep one and other informed of any changes to the promise. It is also the responsibility of both parties to celebrate the delivery!

During this stage the person who originally asked for the promise will also be monitoring the progress to ensure that everything is on track as agreed earlier in the negotiation. It is their job to keep the heat on the individual to ensure that the promise is met. It is also their responsibility to administer any consequences should the promise not be kept.

WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY?



It is an important, yet often overlooked fact that you cannot be accountable by yourself. You can only be accountable in relation to another person who is holding you to account. You can be very responsible on your own. You can

work really hard on your own. You can do excellent things and achieve great results on your own. But to be accountable you must be in relationship with someone else. It is a contract. Therefore one person is asking “Can I count on you?” and the other is delivering the promise.

Accountability is a promise.

If you were to get nothing else out of this book I would ask you to consider making this apparently simple and almost harmless little change to your language and your thinking and encourage your team to do the same.

If you start to view your agreements as promises things will change...

Just saying the words feels very differently. Accountability is quite a cold, detached word – it doesn't conjure up any great depth of feeling. A promise does! Even saying the word out loud evokes a feeling of honour and "doing the right thing". This book will allow you to harness that deep-seated power. Use the word promise in your everyday language and business dealings, start making promises and keep them and I guarantee your business and your life will change.

Combine that force with one of our basic human drivers known as Achievement Motivation and you are creating a very powerful tool for accountability.

Achievement motivation is present in everyone (to a greater or lesser extent) and is the drive to achieve success in our lives. It is the natural and instinctive drive for a child to start crawling and finally learn to walk and run. It is our basic human need to improve. When you start to foster and encourage

an environment of accountability it naturally triggers our latent achievement motivation.



- Promise's Promise's

The psychologist David McClelland studied the Achievement Motivation in depth. He studied individuals and societies whose success and economic well-being indicated a strong achievement drive.

McClelland studied different cultures and the values that drove those cultures. He studied their fairytales as the indicators of their values and belief systems. He studied a community, which had experienced huge job losses, and closures of complete industries to see what separated those people that started again and those people that just gave up.

What he discovered was that those that fought and started again had a number of common factors.

Achievers are prolific goal setters

They do this because they love the thrill of achieving a goal that they have set for themselves. So they are continually setting goals. Once they have achieved one goal, they set another one. It is a continual process because they get their "kicks" from doing what they say they will do. In addition goals provide direction and achievers require movement – stagnation equals death. Goals therefore act as a success compass to assess experience – does this take me closer to or further from my goals.

One of the distinguishing factors in individuals with high achievement motivation is that they are great list makers. They make lists not only to make sure they don't forget something, but much more

importantly they make lists so they can get the satisfaction of ticking off each item as it is done.

In fact many list junkies confess to putting a couple of items on the list, which they have already done, just to have the satisfaction of ticking them off!! Sound like you? If so you have the makings of a high achiever!

Interestingly, the small thrills are as satisfying as the big ones. For example arriving on time is a small and simple achievers “buzz”. The intended time of arrival becomes the goal, and the task of working back from that point and planning what needs to occur in order to arrive on time is the task. There is a quiet satisfaction as they roll up to the venue with just a few minutes to spare.

Because achievers need a fairly regular fix of achievement satisfaction, they tend to break their longer-term goals down into short-term milestones. After all, one or two years is a long time to wait between success buzzes! It is the feeling that is the motivation as much as the end result therefore the more often this is experienced, the better.

They develop a deep understanding of risk.



Because an achiever gets there satisfaction from achieving things, then they need to ensure that they can achieve the things they set out to achieve. To do this consistently they have to become extremely good at anticipating all of the

factors, which could occur to cause them not to achieve what was originally intended. And it is a very fine art. They don't want it to be too difficult so that they sabotage their chances of achieving it; neither do they want it to be too easy so that it is boring or holds no thrill at completion.

They choose something that they believe they can achieve – given their abilities and skills – which still requires a certain amount of stretch and effort. This is because the fundamental objective of setting a goal is to enjoy the satisfaction of achieving the goal. This boosts confidence so a positive loop to greater and greater growth is entered into and larger and larger goals are set and achieved. They will not set themselves goals that are in the realm of what we call - “luck, chance and magic”. They like to have control over the outcome.

Just look at the queues of people lining up to buy lottery tickets when there is a bigger than normal jackpot – it is a scene repeated all over the world. This is an example of “luck, chance and magic” in action. Taking on winning odds of 75 million to one is not something an achiever would normally do. Because they have no control over the outcome so no personal achievement can be experienced. You can hear when someone is in “luck, chance and magic land”. They say things like “well I hope so” or “such and such thinks that might be possible”. Achievers don't cross their fingers and close their eyes and hope for the best – they plan!

An achiever would choose a goal that they have a pretty good expectation that they can achieve. Here's an example. Probably a number of you have

watched the Ironman Triathlon on TV – either in Hawaii or Australia. No doubt, like I you have sat on your lounge chair in awe of these amazing athletes wondering what could possess someone to do that to themselves!

I have often wondered where they started in their aspirations. I'm sure they have taken many years of dedication to build up to this level, and many hours of practice. But did they start with the goal to finish the Ironman? Probably not! I've talked to several people who have participated in this event and asked them where they started and they all said that they started with a goal to run 5 or 10 km or to swim 1km or to cycle for 10 to 20km. They all said that at the time of starting their exercise programme participating in the Ironman wasn't even a dream.

Instead they set themselves a goal which they felt that they could achieve. Once that was achieved they set themselves a more challenging objective and so on. Eventually they were able to have confidence that they could participate in the Ironman and set that goal for themselves.

So they were able to say to themselves “what is an appropriate challenge that I could undertake and give myself a pretty good chance of achieving – given my level of skill at the moment”. In this way they were able to keep themselves motivated by having the continual “buzz” of achieving objectives.

So a particular characteristic of those with high motivation is their extensive consideration of risk. Risks are everything, which might go wrong. Achievers want to know the risks, not so that they can worry about them but so that they can avert

them. Achievers always have a Plan B or a way of overcoming or compensating for the risk itself!

Either course of action serves to deliver what is required, which is an increased confidence that the goal can still be achieved

Achievers love to keep score

That is because they need to know where they are up to on the journey to the achievement of the goal. So they keep records or times (such as personal best time in a sporting endeavour) which give them the feedback and reference they need to say whether they are on track or not. As soon as they see themselves off track, they take corrective action as quickly as possible. After all, the achievement of the goal is the most important thing – so they are good at correcting quickly and getting on with the activities that will lead them to their goal. They also make sure that they check in regularly to see if they are on track or not. They don't leave it too long before checking in, otherwise they may be too far off course, and then it's much harder to correct.

Imagine playing tennis with no lines on the court. You would never know whether a shot was a good one or not. And imagine if there was no mechanism for adding up points won. There is a certain pleasure to be gained from playing a good stroke or perfecting your backhand. But this pleasure will always be limited if you can't determine where it landed on the court. A perfect shot just on the outside of the line is not a perfect shot!

So keeping score is a pleasure for achievers – it is neither intimidating nor something to be avoided.

Achievers will seek out every mechanism they can for knowing how they are going against the goals they have set.

Achievers lose most of their motivation if the score keeping mechanisms are not in place, or if they are hazy and unreliable. They get bored of the game, because it does not give them the opportunity to succeed.

Achievers have a self-driven view of the world – seeing self as the cause rather than the effect of what occurs.

This perspective can be seen and heard in the behaviour and language of an achiever. It is the skill of being able to look at a problem and find a solution not a justification or reason. We call this staying “above the line” and is a concept we will discuss in greater detail later in the book. Achievers think in terms of how they contributed to a particular outcome. Even when things occurred which are outside of their sphere of influence, they will still use language, which places responsibility back with them.

For example you arrive late to a meeting. What do you say?

The most commonly used reason is “sorry I’m late the traffic was terrible”. This blames an external event not the individual (going “below the line”). Making oneself at cause rather than at the effect of the traffic requires a different kind of language. “I did not anticipate the traffic would be so bad”. The responsibility for anticipation, for planning, for

thinking through how the traffic is likely to be, is yours. You choose what time you leave your previous meeting, based on the conclusions you reach about the traffic scenario.

When someone goes “below the line” they will blame external events or people for their inaccuracy of judgment. This creates a “victim mentality” and renders people helpless, where they give up on finding a solution before they have even applied any thought to the challenge. As we all know this is not conducive to solutions. Achievers on the other hand will always take responsibility for the outcome regardless of their actual role in that outcome. So the focus is always on finding a solution not on who or what to blame.

Achievers are intrinsically motivated

Whilst they might like the public recognition and reward that comes with achievement, it is not the primary driver. The primary driver for an achiever is to feel good about themselves by doing what they say they will do. How many times have you stayed back at work to finish something simply because you said you would. Chances are there was no-one else around and you perhaps could have even had a “good reason” not to but the internal need to do what you said you would was enough to keep **you** at your desk for those extra few hours. And the satisfaction you got when it was done was far more rewarding than any subsequent pat on the back you may or may not have received!

Achievers create a tension by setting up a goal, which is sufficiently stretching that reaching it would require considerable skill on their part. There is therefore an element of challenge. When

they succeed, their reward comes from knowing they achieved what they set out to achieve.

They are motivated by achievement itself not by seeking the approval of others, looking good in their eyes or winning some prize. If there is some external reward, be it money, medals or other recognition, these are valued because they are society's symbols of success, however they are not the driving forces. They are a way of keeping score, an external validation and acknowledgment that the goal was met.

So there you have it. The five principles of achievement as defined by David McClelland in his book *The Achieving Society*.

The consequence of this research meant that we could see for the first time the characteristics of highly motivated people.

So were these characteristics teachable? Was it possible to trigger the achievement motivation in others? Was it possible to create the environment where perhaps less naturally motivated individuals would rise to that challenge AND enjoy the process?

Yes!

By finding ways to help you incorporate these principles into your daily activity you can build a working environment, which supports these principles and allows you to trigger your own, and other people's natural achievement motivation.

Wouldn't it be great if all your staff were taking responsibility for achieving their own goals, contingency planning to cover risks, keeping score effectively and correcting themselves when off track, not blaming others when things go wrong but instead finding empowering new solutions. And of course feeling good about themselves and their abilities and contribution. This is what you have in store for you if you diligently practice these skills and make them part of "the way we do things around here".

By implementing an Achievement culture you will reap the rewards of better relationships in all areas of your life. The days of frustration and hostility will become fewer and satisfaction will replace resentment. Over time you will no longer hear management complain about the team and why they are not performance orientated, why they don't seem to care. You will no longer hear the staff congregated around the water cooler bitching about how the company is all talk and no action and feeling just as frustrated. And perhaps even more importantly it will enrich your personal relationships and friendships in ways you would never imagine.

Promises and accountability are not for the faint hearted. It is a simple concept in black and white but incorporating it into your business requires commitment, focus and courage.

Just to get a little insight into how powerful this concept is the next time you require someone in your organisation to do something – ask them the way you would normally ask. Wait for them to give you their answer and then simply ask this...

“Is that a promise?”

review the answer just given. I guarantee you they will think twice before answering the question...

Watch as the individual is basically forced back, through their own intrinsic sense of honour to