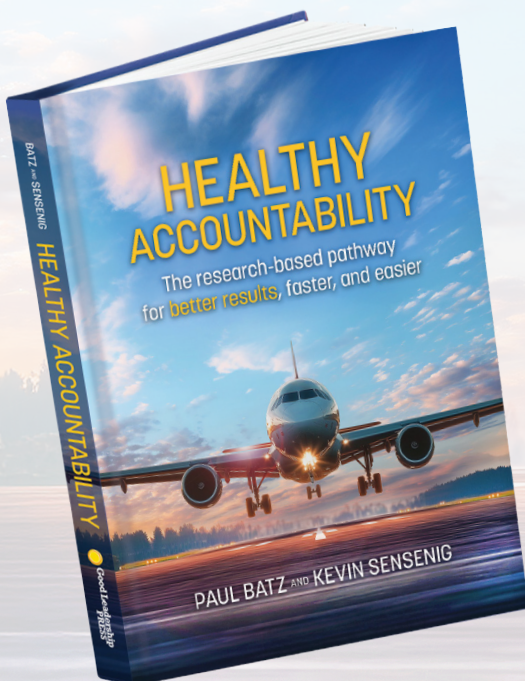


Healthy Accountability

The research-based pathway for better results, faster, and easier



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Healthy accountability is the glue that holds the people and project together—especially when things get sideways. It's about peers helping one another make the necessary mid-course corrections to delivery quality work on time.

PAUL BATZ

Healthy Accountability

The research-based pathway for better results, faster, and easier

Accountability is one of the most sought-after, yet misunderstood, forces in organizations today. Leaders want more of it – more ownership, more follow-through, better results – but often view it through a lens of punishment or control. But *healthy* accountability can be a positive, shared commitment that drives trust, engagement, and performance.

This book reframes accountability as something we enable, not enforce. Grounded in research and real-world insights, it reveals what makes accountability thrive in today's complex, hybrid workplaces – and why it so often breaks down.

The findings show that most people *want* to deliver great work and take responsibility; what's missing is systems – the environment and leadership – that make accountability feel fair, energizing, and shared.

As a result of reading this book, individuals and leaders alike will gain practical actions and proven tools to build a culture where accountability not only feels good, it drives exceptional results.

Note: This executive summary captures only a glimpse of the insights in the full book. By reading the book itself, you'll gain access to powerful real-world experiences from the *Origin Story* organization and research sponsors, along with deeper exploration of key concepts such as the *language of accountability*, *psychological safety*, *the rule of 1.28*, and how *healthy tension* can drive performance. You'll also discover the full scope of the research findings – data and lessons that bring these ideas to life in practical, inspiring ways.

Accountability in our world today and the cry for more of it

Human beings crave fairness. When something goes wrong, our instinct is to demand accountability – to find out who's responsible. In today's world, that collective outcry has only grown louder, influencing the culture inside many organizations.

At the same time, accountability has become more complex and elusive. The COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to remote work reshaped the employee-employer relationship, leaving many senior leaders frustrated that accountability now feels “loose” and “fuzzy.”

A review of recent leadership and organizational performance research and literature reveals a striking truth: accountability is one of the most discussed – and least understood – concepts in business. Often treated as an implicit or reactive measure (“to get things back on track”), it has been under-researched and poorly defined.

The consequences are serious. Despite decades of traditional leadership and performance training, estimated failure rates for the most important work – corporate projects, goals, and strategies – range from 60 to 90%. Those failures cost organizations time, money, missed opportunities, and trust.

So, what is accountability, exactly? Where is it found? How can it be built into our organizations as a positive, motivating force rather than a punitive one? The literature of the past 40 years offers few clear answers.

The Origin Story: “Only One Pilot Lands the Plane”

One specific moment for a Good Leadership client crystalized the need for the research, and became the metaphor for this book.

The client’s CEO had an embarrassing experience of failed accountability in his organization.

Unfortunately, the news of the failure reached the CEO AFTER he confidently told the investment partners he had very good news to share. Fortunately, that moment was right after he boarded a plane for a long flight to the investor meeting – giving him hours to move past his initial reactions and think about what really happened.

Over the course of the flight his anger gave way first to embarrassment, and then to honest self-reflection that allowed him to reach and accept a new set of conclusions.

In a moment of insight, he realized that a huge amount of teamwork had been required in getting his plane to the destination, yet only one pilot lands it. It was then he understood his own role in the failure, and that if anyone should be held accountable, it should be him.

As a result of this experience, the CEO asked a question Good Leadership couldn’t answer with confidence: “How do we use this failure of accountability to rebuild our culture?”

As the CEO and his organization walked through the practices uncovered by the resulting research, the results they achieved became a powerful validation:

Positive role modeling at the top quickly improved daily morale and led to a new level of engagement in the annual planning process.

Disciplined follow through at the team level brought huge results. Within a year, average fulfillment time was cut in half, errors were reduced by 40%, and three people managers received internal promotions to department managers.

Finding the growing edge was a special challenge for this organization. Overcoming it gave employees the confidence and courage to ask for bigger assignments.

Selecting and promoting for accountability paid off almost immediately as new, empowered team members strengthened the business by renegotiating important supplier agreements.

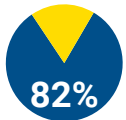
The CEO himself modeled **seeking individual accountability**, laying a strong foundation for an internal task force to identify root cause issues that had to be addressed to change “how things get done around here.”

Ultimately, the teams were able to turn around a 72-year-old culture in just 15 months.

A specific moment for a Good Leadership client crystalized the need for fact-based answers about accountability, based on research in today's challenging world. (see Origin Story) Good Leadership launched a fact-based study to explore the concept. Guided by a dedicated Steering Team that provided leadership, access, partnerships, and funding, the research uncovered both surprising and hopeful insights:



95% of respondents actually care about delivering quality work on time.



82% have observed how healthy accountability improves business results.

This disconnect – between people's intent and their experience – demands curiosity. We need hard facts about how to move from an unhealthy culture of blame to a thriving culture, where accountability feels good for all and becomes an effective competitive advantage for the organization.

The lens of goodness, and Healthy Accountability defined

Informed by their experience with successful enterprises and their own prior research, Good Leadership felt the imperative to start from a lens of goodness.

Goodness is “when people thrive together in a culture of encouragement, accountability, and positive teamwork.” (*How Goodness Pays* – Batz, Hillen 2019)

A reactive approach (the traditional view of accountability) induces fear and avoidance in employees. But with a goodness foundation, accountability is built on a thrive together framework that uses encouragement and positive teamwork to create a “seeks accountability” mindset rather than a “hold accountable” mindset.

This powerful shift to a proactive, goodness-based approach reshapes how organizations think about, approach, and handle accountability. It's the foundation for a culture transformation.

Goodness-driven accountability requires 3 significant mindset shifts:

1. Prioritize people growth before measurement.
2. Treat accountability as a shared commitment rather than a reactive response.
3. Expect senior leaders to role model Healthy Accountability.

Healthy Accountability, defined:

“When people win together in an environment where individuals take personal ownership, and embrace the support of the team, to deliver quality work on time.”

Healthy Accountability Influencers

“The Steering Team emphatically agreed, a culture where employees routinely ‘seek accountability’ is the desired end state of this work.”

In the spirit of the aeronautical metaphor inspired by the origin story (see sidebar), here are some critical factors for Healthy Accountability to exist.

Continuous Course Correction

Stephen Covey popularized the leadership concept of continuous course correction; a practice borrowed directly from the airline industry. The premise is that airplanes are off course during much of the flight, and the only way the pilot lands the plane at the destination is to continually make mid-flight corrections.

But before course corrections can happen, there needs to be a flight plan.

The Flight Plan

When airlines recruit pilots, they promise a flight planning system that will take most of the risk out of flying. Such a plan requires tight integration of data, people, and best practices. If we want to recruit top talent who routinely seek accountability, we need to demonstrate that we know how to help them be accountable and successful.

Flight Planning in Organizations:

- Destination: We agree on what success looks like.
- Weather: We assess the forces (internal and external) that will impact the work.
- Route: We identify who needs to be involved, in what sequence.
- Plane: We plan for the delivery channels (technology and people) we'll need.
- Fuel: We allocate the required resources (time, energy, money).
- Crew: We identify who's in the pilot seat, the co-pilot seat, and all other roles.
- Passengers: We know who is impacted by the work and set up ways to monitor their satisfaction.
- Monitoring Systems: We identify inspectors, schedule inspections, and course-correct accordingly.
- Landing Sequence: We consult with our customer to ensure quality work within the project conditions and constraints.
- Post Flight Evaluation: We conduct a project debrief and make start/stop/continue decisions to be better next time.

Roughly half of participants in Good Leadership's Healthy Accountability workshops admit to weakness in their organization's advance planning model. Organizations that want to improve healthy accountability must develop this discipline.

Commitment Planning

Effective flight planning includes both project management and people management. To be successful, people must be engaged both intellectually and emotionally. Good Leadership thinks of this as “commitment planning.”

ALIGNMENT is agreement on what success looks like. It’s an intellectual agreement, and an important first step toward healthy accountability.

COMMITMENT is the emotional acceptance that comes with the promise of changed behavior. It means I’m willing to behave differently because I love what we’re building together. It’s not just agreement, understanding, or even excitement. It’s visible to others in that behavior change. And it’s hard! It means working with resilience, creativity, and scrappiness to stay focused on the goal.

Healthy Accountability becomes the “glue” that holds the people and the project together, especially when things get sideways (they make mid-course corrections together).

Only One Pilot Lands the Plane

The basis for the whole aeronautical metaphor was the lightbulb moment experienced by the CEO in the origin story (see sidebar). He realized that, despite the huge amount of teamwork required to fly the plane to the destination, “only one pilot lands the plane.”

For many leaders, having spent years emphasizing a collaborative, inclusive leadership style, the *Only One Pilot* metaphor is identity shattering.

The Good Leadership research shows clearly that:

“Accountability is not an individual characteristic; it’s a byproduct of how the organization functions as a system. First, leaders need to embrace the idea that many things can, and need to be shared in organizations – but accountability must be singular. Only One Pilot”
– Kevin Sensenig, co-author

According to the research, there are four fundamental elements that lead to individuals seeking accountability, two at the organization level, and two at the team level.

The Model that resulted from the research

As shared by co-author Kevin Sensenig, “The best way to communicate [the research] findings is with the infinity symbol, where ‘Individuals Seek Accountability’ is the center of two continuous loops. Then the two organizational and two team elements take on the most meaning.”



The elements of Healthy Accountability

NOTE: The research demonstrates that each of these elements correlates directly to specific, measurable, positive results. See book for important details.

Element: **Positive Role Modeling at the Top**

Defined: When leaders are seen demonstrating personal ownership for their responsibilities, maintaining high standards of accountability with senior leaders, and clearly communicating a consistent set of organizational priorities.

Success Habits:

1. Beware of the Proximity Gap (the belief that senior leaders lack accountability, fueled by their limited visibility and communication).
2. Embrace prioritization: Top Three Can't Miss Priorities.
3. Communicate with a Public Scorecard.

Element: **Teams Committed to Disciplined Follow Through**

Defined: When teams embrace proactive planning to define clear roles and responsibilities, establish shared commitments, anticipate challenges, and equip one another to make the mid-course corrections required to deliver quality work on time.

Success Habits:

1. Negotiate shared commitments to improve how teams invest in one another.
2. Use proactive planning to create role clarity and improve personal ownership.
3. Create frequent inspection cycles with communication loops to improve quality and timeliness.

Element: Find the Growing Edge

Defined: When people feel energized in their work because they are confident delivering on their current assignments and are inspired to seek meaningful stretch assignments knowing they have the support and encouragement of the team.

Success Habits:

1. Stretch people and help them grow so they see accountability positively.
2. Use high accountability language to build consistency.
3. Coach with healthy tension to balance routine excellence with stretch assignments.

Element: Select and Promote for Accountability

Defined: When organizations promote individuals who consistently role model healthy accountability, evaluate new hires for personal ownership and follow-through, and make intentional decisions to pass over candidates who do not add to a culture of healthy accountability.

Success Habits:

1. Develop and use a Healthy Accountability Profile to screen, hire, and promote people.
2. Place Industry A-Players in mission-critical roles.
3. Use consistent talent reviews for promotion and development.

Element: Individuals Seek Accountability

Defined: When individuals embrace full ownership of their work and invite the input of others, based on the confidence they will grow from the experience and their contributions will improve the organization's performance.

Success Habits:

1. Invite observation from others.
2. Accept help as an expectation, not an exception.
3. Own the outcome – no deflection, no excuses.

The Healthy Accountability Survey

The Healthy Accountability Survey provides a practical strategy for building the motivation to break the status quo and change things for the better.

It consists of 24 questions, condensed from the research, and produces a pragmatic dashboard aligned with the Pathway to Healthy Accountability™. It's a catalyst to stimulate OxD=U² thinking, and it's effective because data works to draw leaders into important discussions.

The dashboard highlights that the issue is not talent, and not motivation. It's a system problem.

Finding Motivation to do the hard work

Changing an organization's culture – improving its effectiveness – is hard. To successfully face the barriers and resistance around every corner, find and enlist partners who share your vision and frustrations.

This formula may provide some insights:

Opportunity x Dissatisfaction = Shared Urgency ($O \times D = U^2$)

Where:

Opportunity (O) = That boost of adrenaline when we can see an exciting opportunity and magnetic pull of something new.

Dissatisfaction (D) = Recurring frustration, ongoing struggles, and things that just don't feel right about how things get done here.

Shared Urgency (U^2) = This is about finding partners who share your excitement about the opportunity or your frustration with the dissatisfaction.

$$\begin{array}{ccccc} O & \times & D & = & U^2 \\ \text{Opportunity} & & \text{Dissatisfaction} & & \text{Urgency} \end{array}$$

Most organizations are biased to problem-solve (D). Pursuing opportunity (O) means breaking through the status quo. It's uncomfortable. But opportunities transform organizations when a collective group of leaders share a sense of urgency.

"Healthy accountability provides the positive mindset and practices that stretch employees and accelerate them towards their aspirations."
– Darin Lynch, Steering Team Member and Founder and CEO of Irish Titan

Your DIY Quick Start

Here's a quick-start guide to rapidly changing how your people work together, and improving your business results, using the findings from this enlightening research.

What **Individual Contributors** can do right now:

1. Start using high-accountability language. Not "I got this," but "I'll have it to you by noon tomorrow."
2. Create commitment plans for your accountabilities. Before accepting a new assignment or stretch goal, ask questions to clarify scope, timing, and tradeoffs.
3. Normalize mid-course corrections. When something slips or changes, raise it early, then share what you're adjusting and why.

What **People Managers** can do right now:

1. Add the word "healthy" in front of accountability. Don't start any new work without a plan that has specifics: what success will look like, roles and responsibilities, support systems, and competing priorities.
2. Establish weekly accountability check-ins to review commitments, progress, and necessary adjustments. Use it to reset, keep alignment tight, and surprises low.
3. Spotlight healthy accountability in action. Catch people doing healthy accountability well and recognize it.

What **Function Managers** (Directors, Business Unit Leads) can do right now:

1. Narrow the list of priorities to three. Pump up your visibility, volume, and frequency to communicate progress. Use mid-point check-ins for team learning.
2. Blend stretch assignments with capacity awareness. Frame accountability discussions as a growth opportunity, and help people assess impacts and tradeoffs, so they're supported, and able to balance the new project enthusiasm with reality.
3. Reinforce healthy accountability in performance and development conversations. Use the healthy accountability competencies (seek clarity, plan proactively, self-correct, invite peer coaching), help people see what healthy follow-through looks like, and set them up for success with clear goals.

What **Senior Executives** can do right now:

1. Collect and use data to see where healthy accountability is and isn't strong, with data-driven leadership conversations.
2. Reinforce accountability in promotion and selection processes, reward programs, talent review, and succession planning conversations.
3. Adopt and communicate commitment planning as a leadership standard. Begin all major initiatives, stretch assignments, and strategic moves with a "flight plan."

Conclusion

"I'm confident our organization will improve going forward because we've learned our own special brand of healthy accountability." – Francoise Culley-Trotman, CEO of AlohaCare

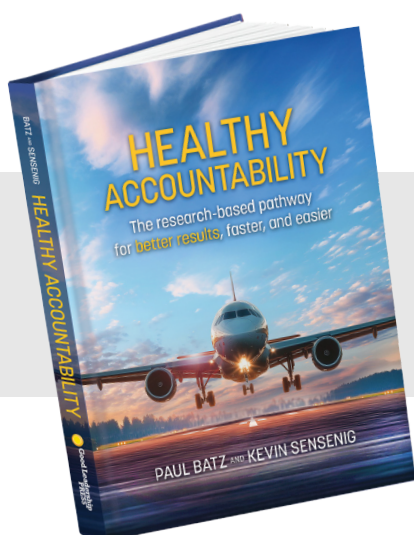
People don't want to hide in the shadows, waiting for clarity from their leaders. They want to step forward, contribute, and take ownership of meaningful work. What they need are leaders who show them what "good" looks like, who trust them with real responsibility, and who create the conditions for everyone to succeed together.

When leaders model healthy accountability they spark a ripple effect. Teams become more confident. Conversations become clearer. And the culture shifts from compliance to commitment. Accountability stops feeling like pressure and starts feeling like power – the kind that fuels growth, learning, and shared success.

In the end, it all comes back to a simple truth: individuals seek accountability. It gives work meaning and clarity. Everyone needs to know their role, their responsibilities, and when they are "the pilot" – when it's their turn to lead, decide, and make a difference.

Healthy accountability is a choice – a choice to lead with clarity, courage, and care.

Let this book be the spark that changes the conversation in your organization. When accountability feels good, people thrive, teams align, and extraordinary results follow – faster, easier, and with far greater joy in the journey.



GET THE BOOK:





Good Leadership is an organizational effectiveness firm that aligns teams to thrive and win together. Clients leverage our coaching processes and development programs to strengthen their links to execution and build leadership capacity around the central concept: goodness pays.



Goodness pays when goodness grows. In every situation, the core solution is to find the goodness in the organization and its people, then stimulate that goodness to help it grow faster.



About Paul Batz

Paul Batz is the Founder and CEO of Good Leadership, an organizational effectiveness firm built on partnerships with clients, independent coaches, trade associations, and professional services firms—all bound together by the belief that Goodness Pays. Paul is a CEO executive coach and author of eight books on leadership. He is quickly becoming the thought leader on Healthy Accountability, and the constant voice for how Goodness Pays in leadership and business.

About Kevin Sensenig

Kevin J. Sensenig, Ph.D., is the founder and President of PivotPoint Leadership and Senior Coaching Associate with Good Leadership. He is a globally recognized expert in organizational effectiveness, leadership development, and team dynamics. With over 25 years of progressive leadership experience and a track record of working with leaders from 180+ countries, Kevin empowers executives, boards, and teams to drive success through pragmatic strategies and actionable insights. A dynamic speaker, coach, and trusted advisor, Kevin blends his extensive academic background with his entrepreneurial experience as the founder and president of multiple companies. Kevin equips leaders to create impactful plans, foster positive accountability, and build cohesive teams that deliver sustained results.



**Learn more about how Health
Accountability by connecting with Paul
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