

A Culture Trap – Activity versus Accountability

My four-year-old grandson Garrett was chasing a three-year-old playmate around our house the other day. The moms, who were also visiting, were worried that he was bullying the littler one until on the next circuit the three-year-old was doing the chasing. They were having a great time.

The situation reminded me of some of the insurance executives I have observed over the years. No, I've never actually seen an executive chase a subordinate, but there are companies where this picture is closer to the truth than anyone would like. These are companies where employees don't see the purpose or results of their work but are always encouraged to do more of it.

It's sad, because even if employees are doing the right things, not understanding why or not being connected to the results they produce will always lower expectations, performance and results. And it creates an environment where change and improvement becomes more difficult. What I'm talking about is beguiling because it isn't an activity trap; it's more of a culture trap. For those companies caught in this trap, activity levels are very high, but results never seem to be what they could be.

The trap is this: Having a culture where the leaders or managers are accountable for results and the doers are not. They are expected to just do. That's it. This simple culture trap is the cause of a lot of sub-optimal results. If you've been reading our past mailings you probably know where I'm heading with this.

Where does the culture come from? A little of it comes from the belief systems and the communications coming from the executive team. Most of it comes from how the company is organized and how employees are hired, trained, empowered and rewarded. The "people systems" if you will. You see, it is possible for the leaders to take on too much accountability, and for the doers to actually focus too much on the "doing" without being cognizant enough of the ultimate results. Success comes from having everyone in the company know and care about not just their activities, but the results of those activities and how they fit in to the company as a whole. Organizations that thrive have learned how to foster this perspective in all of their employees. Of course it's not about what is said about accountability, it is what is actually *done* about it.

A culture of accountability is evidenced when everyone owns their own results. Employees are as conversant with and connected to the goals of the company as are the executives. They take responsibility for seeing to it that the results are achieved. When something isn't quite right they make it right, or ask for help. They don't suffer in silence and they do not settle for sub-par work results. Like Garrett and his little friend, they take an active role in what's happening. Good results flow naturally from everyone knowing what to do and doing it. Nobody feels chased.

We are expert at helping you create a culture, an organization and infrastructure with this level of accountability. It's not only very effective; it's a lot more fun. Garrett and his playmate understood this. They understood the importance of having control over what they were doing and the joy of being able to change and be spontaneous when appropriate. And it worked for them because they also understood the rules and limits. Well designed companies work the same way.

I'm sorry that Garrett isn't available yet to help with your problems. But we are. We understand insurance companies and know how to make them work. It's what we do. Check our website (McDonaldConsultingGroup.com) for more details.