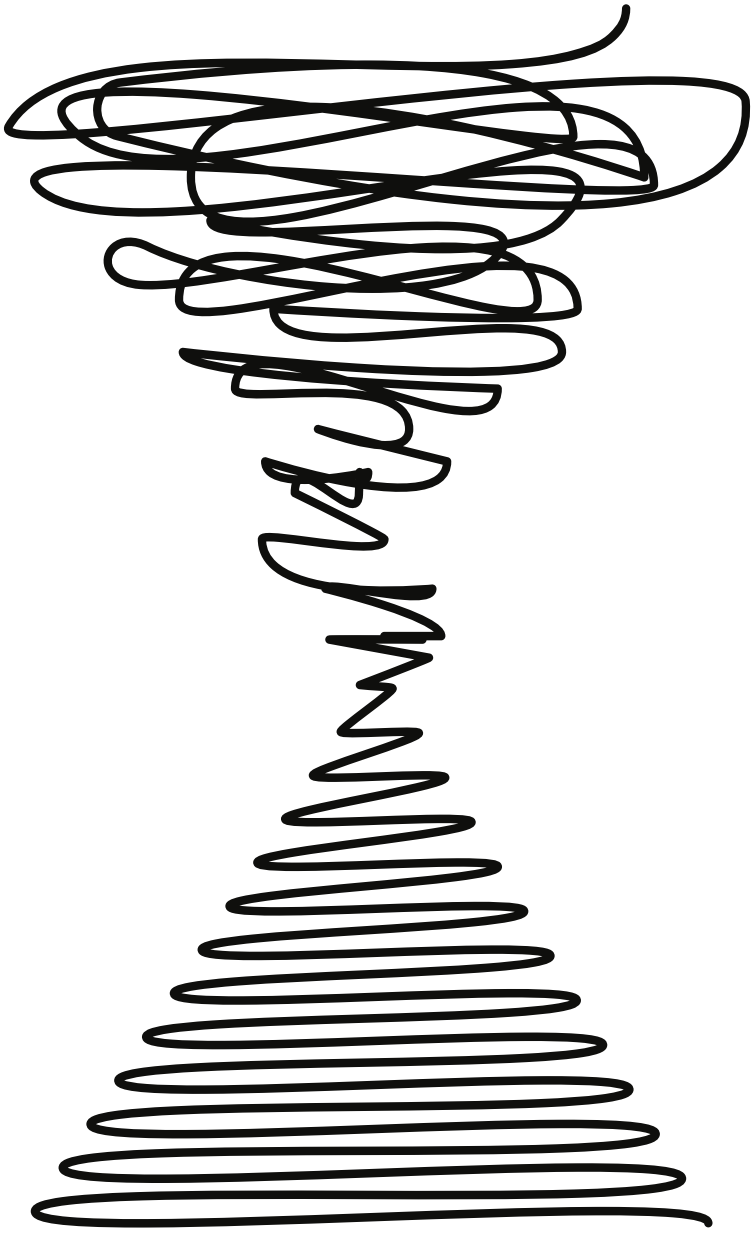
CONSCIOUS ACCOUNTABILITY

Deepen Connections, Elevate Results



DAVID C. TATE | MARIANNE S. PANTALON | DARYN H. DAVID

More Praise for This Book

"*Conscious Accountability* presents a profound concept, beautifully described. If you want to be a better leader or have a better life, read this book to gain timeless wisdom uniquely positioned to help with today's challenges."

—**Amy C. Edmondson**, Professor, Harvard Business School; Author, *The Fearless Organization*

"This insightful book offers a fresh look at accountability. It will help any leader in any organization deepen relationships and improve team performance."

—**Daniel H. Pink**, *New York Times* Bestselling Author, *The Power of Regret*, *Drive*, and *When*

"In this important new work, the authors explain why accountability is about more than efficiency—it's at the core of healthy relationships. Conscious accountability is not a way of checking boxes, but a way of being human."

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"We don't often think of happiness and accountability as complementary terms. But *Conscious Accountability* makes an artful case for reimagining accountability so that it works not only in achieving our goals but also in strengthening the bonds with our colleagues and communities."

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"*Conscious Accountability* is a brilliantly written, must-read for any professional. The ultimate how-to guide for accelerating valuable outcomes, this book offers a highly practical framework for moving to the next level of influence, no matter your level of experience. The authors also illustrate how practicing conscious accountability can create a positive force for change in the world."

—**Geetu Bharwaney**, Founder and CEO, Ei World

"*Conscious Accountability* is a must-read for any CEO or leader. To turn dreams into a successful business you have to create an outstanding work culture—which means getting accountability right. Relatable anecdotes make it easy to read this book and absorb the concepts, plus it's packed with actionable tips and exercises. A fantastic resource!"

—**Julia Pimsleur,** Founder and CEO, Million Dollar Women; Author, *Million Dollar Women* and *Go Big Now*

"*Conscious Accountability* helps us be more aware of ourselves, reminds us of the power we harness when we are thoughtful about our relationships, and gives us critical tools to accomplish our goals. I encourage anyone who wants to inspire, connect, and deliver positive results, for the benefit of your professional and personal life, to read this book."

—**Justin Elicker,** Mayor, New Haven, Connecticut

"*Conscious Accountability* makes a tremendous contribution by showing us how accountability can be an inclusive practice—one that connects us to people, missions, and organizations. As we wrestle with new forms of work, political turmoil, and the uncertainties of a global pandemic, chapter-by-chapter this book frames awareness, intention, and the practice of accountability as tools we can use to incentivize ourselves and our teams to do our best work."

—**Kerwin Charles,** Dean, Yale School of Management

"Perhaps more than ever, all organizations need to embrace a new way of considering accountability—one that elevates the power and importance of relationships in ensuring a sustained and successful way forward. *Conscious Accountability* moves beyond a transactional, product-driven approach by showing us how to build self-reflective, humanistic skills into our leadership practices. Every leader needs the lessons this book has to offer."

—**Linda Mayes,** Arnold Gesell Professor of Child Psychiatry, Pediatrics, and Psychology; Director, Yale Child Study Center

"Build the team, communication style, and efficiency you've dreamed of for your company with *Conscious Accountability!* As experts in leadership development, David, Marianne, and Daryn will teach you step-by-step how to create cultures where accountability to your work and team can thrive."

—**Marshall Goldsmith,** Thinkers50 #1 Executive Coach; *New York Times* bestselling author, *Triggers*, *Mojo*, and *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*

"The COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented disruption in communities, organizations, and the lives of countless people. *Conscious Accountability* offers engaging and clearly written guidance for getting back on our feet and for creating a new era of productivity and work satisfaction."

—**Robert M. Kaplan,** Clinical Excellence Research Center, Stanford University School of Medicine

"*Conscious Accountability* offers a way of thinking and acting in our relationships—with colleagues, family, friends, and self—that promises to help us accomplish meaningful things together and build better relationships. The authors use stories, illustrations, and exercises to share practical wisdom and wise practices for experiencing accountability, not as a means of control or being controlled, but as a humane exchange in which we help one another live up to our aspirations."

—**Ruth Wageman,** Founder, 6 Team Conditions

"*Conscious Accountability* is a powerful must-read for anyone wanting to take their management, leadership, or organizational effectiveness to the highest level. The book offers a practical framework for applying a proactive approach to accountability in the complex, evolving leadership landscape."

—**Scott Drozd,** CEO, FCP Euro

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To Jimmy and Jude—two of my greatest teachers—
who continually show me the way to becoming
more conscious and more accountable.
—DCT

To my husband Michael, the most
committed and accountable person I know.
To Matt who reminds me to slow down and notice.
To Nick who inspires me to keep trying.
—MSP

To Jeffrey—your kindness and steady support,
your compassionate wisdom and your sense of integrity
provided the light that guided me to the shore.
—DHD

Contents

Introduction

The price of greatness is responsibility.

WINSTON CHURCHILL

Have you ever worked with someone who was really good at accountability? Someone who helped get the job done while also raising their game along the way? Someone you would never dream of letting down? The type of person who always brings the best out of everyone around them? What qualities come to mind that would describe this person?

Kendra Curtis is one of those people. A Canadian with a creative spirit and engineering mind, Kendra has been enjoying building furniture during her early retirement after a successful career as a software engineer. She began managing teams at Google when the organization was less than a decade old, an experience that formed her approach to leadership and accountability after she moved on.

As an engineering manager at a different high growth tech company, Kendra was tasked with leading a multidisciplinary team in the development of a cloud-based application of a database. The project had a hard deadline

and not enough engineers on staff. To be accountable to delivering the product on time, Kendra knew she would need more hands on deck. Therefore, she was charged with building the team and the product at the same time.

She dove in with a commitment to clarity. In fact, Kendra shared that *clarity* is the first word that comes to mind when she thinks of accountability. And not just clarity about the task and who owns what, but clarity about why they are doing the task, and if they have the right people for it.

As Kendra started to assemble the right people, she organized them into groups she called "Feature Pods." The pods included all the people who had skin in the game: the engineers, the user-interface designer, the person who would write the user documents, and anyone else who was developing that feature. They met on a weekly basis.

Getting the teams engaged posed some challenges. People had a lot of questions. They wondered, "What are we supposed to do in these Feature Pod meetings? What is the purpose? I don't get it." So she laid out the aims of the pods: to keep an open line of communication and to make sure they were all on the same page regarding the feature, the goals, and how they were getting there. To make their weekly meeting not feel like a performance review, she organized the discussions around a very simple framework with three main questions:

- What is the progress you have made?
- What are the problems?
- What is your plan?

To encourage buy-in and commitment, she invited people to come on a journey with her. "Do one feature like this with me," she said. "I know you don't experiment. I'm just asking you to try it once with me, and then we will evolve it." That took humility and vulnerability on her part, which she hoped her team members would reciprocate throughout the process.

Between their meetings, the team relied on written communication, which Kendra knew could be easily misunderstood and misinterpreted. Her aim was to coach the team to expect miscommunications and realize the need for several attempts to get to clarity. During one-on-one meetings she would

demonstrate this using an email that one of her direct reports had written. She would share her interpretation of it, which was intentionally different from the intended message of the writer, to show how easily miscommunication could occur. Often, it was a watershed moment for the writer.

To create an atmosphere that encouraged experimentation and risk taking and to set the stage for deep engagement to occur, Kendra made a habit of sharing her own failures. At her first job as an engineer, her team was making some of the first wireless networking equipment and she was making a chip driver. She had to put these little probes on this small chip, but she shorted out two of the pins with the little probe. As she likes to retell it, "I let the magic smoke out. Literally, smoke started coming out of the chip and the chip stopped working."

She was so upset that it took her a week to work up the courage to tell her boss. When she finally showed him the chip and the melted probe, he laughed and said, "Oh yeah, something bad happened," and then he gave her a new board, saying, "Here you go, and now when you break that one, you come and tell me."

By sharing her own mishaps and struggles, she communicated that she has been there, she has messed up, and she knows what that is like. Not only did she anticipate that team members would break things, like she did, but she also considered it a critical rite of passage for people to be celebrated at the moment they became a full-fledged member of the team.

When people would join her team, especially new engineers, she would say, "You're not an engineer until you break something. I want you to come and tell me when you have broken something because I want to give you a high five and welcome you into the group of true engineers." This encouraged team members to embody the grit to work through these failures and the grace to accept that things sometimes just go wrong.

She also built a culture of constructive feedback, baking it in as a standard occurrence and always leading with what was going well. During a team's first after-action review, Kendra shared, "I would start with a little speech about how this is not about pointing fingers or assigning blame.

We're all human. Mistakes are always going to happen. And the only time I'll be upset is if we keep repeatedly making the same mistake. But if you make a mistake, that's OK. And next time we're going to find a much more creative and interesting way to make a mistake—because we're going to be in this room again." This was all about noticing with compassion, and sharing and receiving feedback without judgment, so they could respond effectively, learn from it, and move forward.

The structure and process of the Feature Pods also had a powerful impact on team dynamics and on elevating a culture where relationships were central. The pods created more empathy and better understanding among a cross-functional team. Members were able to see the perspectives of the other roles because they needed to work together to make a successful feature. The engineer could build the most successful feature ever, but if the documentation person did not understand it and could not write user documentation for it, the feature would just languish. They would understand why the project manager was pushing so hard to know when a piece of technology would be delivered. This all led to deeper conversations and improved communication, enabling the team to become more accountable to one another.

As can be expected, there were bumps in the road and setbacks as they developed the product. Some challenges were people related; others were more task focused. When Kendra had a problem with a tech lead who did not buy into the process, she attempted numerous times to coach the individual. Eventually, she had to make the difficult decision to remove this person as tech lead because they were not a good fit. At other times, setbacks occurred around product development. For example, the team would come to the conclusion that the feature they were attempting to build out did not make sense and they would need to go back to the drawing board.

This individuals were enabled to thrive by teams with a clear goal; guidelines for communication, feedback, and iteration; and a culture that viewed failure as progress. The conditions were set for ideas and empathy to freely flow, and they were able to flexibly adapt both their work process and the product development. As a result, they became more accountable to

themselves and to the team in a way that led to transformative results. The rollout of their product was so successful that any time a new project was put forth, people immediately started asking about the Feature Pods.

Kendra's openness to try, learn, and try again allowed this project and process to launch. She exemplified a growth mindset with regard to both the development of the teams and the product. Things will go wrong, stuff will break, some people won't be the right fit. We just don't know all that we will get. However, a commitment to being open, to look deeper for what is not obvious, and to keep trying are the bricks that can form the path for a journey of continuously improved accountability.

Why Does Accountability Matter?

You do not have to look very far to see why accountability is so important. It is everywhere—in our workplaces, in our marriages and families, in our friendships, and in our communities. It exists with the person we see each morning in the mirror and with strangers we will never meet. Accountability matters because it lies at the core of healthy and productive human relationships. It functions as the invisible thread that connect us to other people and enables more effective interactions with others in fundamental ways. Its presence or absence can mean the difference between success or failure, between the extraordinary or the mediocre, and even between life or death. Consider these examples:

- We often have some goal for ourselves, or some way in which we want to grow, change, or improve. We want to eat healthier or exercise more. We want to learn a new language, or write a book, or spend more time with loved ones. But how many times do we say or initiate some new activity or endeavor, and then fail to follow through? Accountability can make the difference between reaching the goal or not.
- Now more than ever, many of us are juggling our professional and personal lives. In a single day, we try to serve our clients, customers, or superiors; support our colleagues; meet deadlines; and respond to

countless emails. And in that same day, we also may need to ensure that children get fed and off to school, to remember what our spouse asked us to do, to bring our relative to a doctor's appointment, to call back the friend who really needs a listening ear, or to make room for some kind of self-care or personal development. Accountability makes the difference between delivering on our promises or dropping the ball and letting people and ourselves down.

- The realities of modern work life add complexity to the process of getting things done and people's experience of each other in that process. More of us are working from home or in offices dispersed around the globe. We rely on technology to connect with others through email, texting, and video calls. And organizations need to do more with fewer resources. Communication and building relationships under these conditions can be much more challenging. Accountability makes the difference between teams aligning and winning together or becoming disjointed and flailing.
- Finally, consider the problems associated with the Boeing 737-MAX aircraft, which went into operation in 2017 but was grounded in March 2019 after two crashes, killing 346 people. Investigations found that multiple parties failed to do what they were supposed to do, including company engineers, managers, and government regulators (Schaper 2020). In cases like this one, accountability makes the difference between life and death.

Accountability is the powerful but often elusive "secret sauce" that makes a profound difference in our results. But what does it really mean to be accountable? And what are the risks when we are not accountable?

Earlier, we saw the excellent example of Kendra engaging in the practices of conscious accountability, leading to the development of a tight team and stellar results. Conversely, neglecting these practices puts you at risk of a whole host of problems. Have you ever worked with someone or on a team that was really bad at accountability? Where it was really difficult to bring your A game? A time when you felt let down and could not help but let others down too?

Perhaps people seemed to be in their silos, discussions were challenging, the atmosphere was tense, and there was a lack of trust. Maybe people were apathetic and just phoning it in. Chances are this experience left you feeling uninspired, demoralized, resentful, angry, frustrated, confused, or disconnected. Whatever your experience, when we are not accountable to ourselves and each other, we feel bad and our work and relationships suffer. Conscious accountability offers a new way forward.

What Is Conscious Accountability?

In this book, we will describe our notion of accountability at its best—what we call *conscious accountability*. We define it as expanding awareness to create deliberate intentions, take informed actions, and be responsible for our impact. Let's break that down a bit further. By *awareness*, we mean awareness of ourselves, awareness of other people, and awareness of the interdependence between self and others. *Deliberate intentions* refers to having preconceived ideas about what it is we want to do, and about the desired effects we want to have on others. *Informed actions* are actions that are both informed by our awareness and are consistent with our intentions. Finally, *being responsible for our impact* means acknowledging that our actions (and inactions) affect other people, and that we are willing to own the results that follow.

We believe that conscious awareness is the thing that helps us become more accountable. How does that work? When we are more aware of ourselves (what we need, want, and value), we can communicate our expectations more clearly. When we are more aware of others (what they need and want, and the context in which they are operating), we can better understand them, honor their expectations of us, and respond to them with empathy. When we are more aware of the interdependence between ourselves and others, we are in a better position to generate win-win scenarios. When we are aware of our impact on others, we can better adjust and become more committed to behaviors that support the kind of influence on others that we hope to have. Taken together, the result of greater consciousness is both better task outcomes (things get done well) and improved human relationships (more

understanding and an enhanced sense of our connection to others). In this way, conscious accountability goes beyond something that is transactional in nature—you do your part, and I will do mine. It becomes more transformational, which makes more meaning, joy, fulfillment, and excellence possible.

So, how do you actually create conscious accountability? The simple answer is, through practice. To help develop your personal capacity to create conscious accountability with other people, this book offers seven practices, which we call the CONNECT framework. Here's a quick summary:

1. **Creating clarity.** This practice is all about establishing a clear vision and shared goals and expectations. It requires strong, crisp communication in which people can negotiate the terms of interacting together, so that they can identify and iron out any areas of potential disagreement or misalignment. For example, at the outset of every meeting, Nancy, an elementary school principal, establishes both the desired outcomes ("What do we want to walk away with?"), as well as the desired process for reaching the outcomes ("How do we need to work together to reach our goals?").
2. **Opening up engagement.** This practice is about creating the conditions in which people feel safe and free to express themselves and feel committed to working together to complete the tasks at hand. Engineering manager Peter helps establish safety by emphasizing the importance of learning (especially learning through trial and error), which helps his team feel more comfortable admitting and discussing the times when things do not go as planned. Peter also takes the time to explain the purpose and the reasoning for any decisions, helping the team see why their work matters. This helps foster greater commitment among team members.
3. **Nailing it.** This practice means doing what you say you will do and ensuring that others are doing the same. It often involves managing competing priorities so that balls do not get dropped and helping others organize toward task completion. For important deadlines, Rajeed sits down with team members and helps them figure out

how to make space for the necessary actions, ensuring there is a plan in place for dealing with anything that could pull the team's focus elsewhere.

4. **Noticing.** In this practice, people pay attention to what they are seeing outwardly and experiencing internally, actively checking in with others to share any of their observations and ensure the other person is doing OK with their part. This includes noticing when actions are veering off from previously agreed-on intentions. Maria, a nurse manager, walks the hospital floor to get a sense of the general mood and, based on what she sees, will check in with her staff. After she delegates a project, she will touch base to see how it is going and ensure her staff have what they need to make progress.
5. **Exchanging feedback.** This practice involves soliciting, receiving, and giving feedback to help oneself and others expand awareness, learn what is or is not working, and make any necessary course corrections. Joe and Elaine, who have been married for 15 years, have a date night every week. Part of their weekly ritual is to ask each other how they did at attending to important things that matter to each of them, which they have discussed previously. Then each person shares one appreciation of what went well and one wish for how things could go better for the coming week.
6. **Claiming it.** This practice is all about taking ownership and responsibility for the results—both the successes and the failures—and consolidating the learning without blaming others. Scott, the CEO of a manufacturing company, has a sign outside his office that says, "The buck stops here." When the company is successful, he recognizes the individuals and teams that made it happen. When they fail, he takes responsibility for making sure that measures are taken so it never happens again.
7. **Trying again.** This practice is about taking what you have learned from an experience and applying it in the next situation. It is crucial for creating a cycle of continuous improvement. Iris, who runs a

small consulting firm, sits down with her team after every client engagement wraps up. They review what happened, determining what they learned and how to implement any new insights in the next project.

Now think back to the beginning of this introduction and the descriptors that you associated with someone who is really good at accountability. How many of those ideas are related to these seven practices? Did clear expectations or clarity make your list? What about safety and commitment? Or doing what you say you will do? How about noticing and checking in with others? Or exchanging feedback and taking responsibility? That is what it means to embody conscious accountability.

What Will This Book Offer You?

This book is a resource for anyone who wants to improve their own effectiveness, both at getting things done and optimizing relationships. But it is especially helpful for people who are responsible for getting work done with and through others, whose work focuses on and supports the well-being of others, and for anyone focused on building organizational culture (for example, leaders and managers). This book is for people who want to become masterful at holding high expectations while also holding themselves and others in full humanity.

To bring these concepts to life, we draw from the rich experiences of our lives and those of our clients. Across the book, we will share our own stories and present real, fictional, and hybrid accounts that cover a range of different industries (healthcare, academia, finance, and technology) and business types (startups, nonprofits, family run, private equity, Fortune 1000), based on our work coaching and consulting with practitioners, leaders, and teams. In presenting these cases, we have worked hard to anonymize any features that could identify the people on whom such stories may be based. We hope they will bring to life the successes and setbacks that can occur when accountability is involved.

This book will invite you to think about yourself and others in your life more completely and to try out new ways of thinking and acting. Specifically, you will have the opportunity to explore the skills and mindsets of the seven practices of conscious accountability. Through the CONNECT framework, we will give you the tools you need to better relate to everyone in your professional and personal life—to raise your understanding and awareness of basic human needs like autonomy, mastery, and belonging; to put people in a position to succeed and inspire excellence everywhere you turn; to enjoy more meaningful relationships; and to absolutely, positively crush your goals. With this book, you will discover how to create a culture of accountability for yourself and others around you.

You will do this, first, by developing your capacity for self-reflection. Reflection is a crucial means of increasing conscious awareness of self and others, which will allow you to operate with greater intentionality and, ultimately, to become more accountable. Throughout this book we will invite you to reflect upon both your internal and external experiences. Second, you will also be invited to take actions by engaging in specific practices that will increase your personal, interpersonal, and team effectiveness over time. You will not be perfect at this. Neither will we. In fact, no one will ever be. You will have good days and bad days, successful and failed attempts. The important thing is to be in it for the learning—which is always available, if you are open to finding it.

Who We Are in This Work

We, the authors, come to the work around conscious accountability in a number of ways. We are psychologists who bring theoretical and practical expertise on human behavior change. We are executive coaches who have walked alongside people through their journeys to greater personal satisfaction and team performance. We are also educators who teach strategies for greater personal and leadership effectiveness to graduate students, faculty members, healthcare professionals, executives, and leaders from around the world. But primarily, we come to this work as fellow human beings who

strive to "walk the talk" every day in our professional and personal lives. And, like you, we experience the challenges associated with work, life, and relationships, complete with all of the ups and downs.

The time during which we wrote this book—from late 2019 through late 2021—was a particularly turbulent moment in modern history. We have watched a global pandemic wreak havoc on people's lives and livelihoods. We have witnessed the rightful struggles for greater equity, justice, and inclusion for marginalized people in the United States. We have seen the global political and social order shaken. We have experienced the stress of civic polarization and have been saddened by the divides that have emerged in the US, in our communities, and in our own families.

All of these things have increased our own need to live the practices we discuss in these pages. We have had to be clearer with spouses about family members' needs and expectations that come along with working and schooling from home. We have thought deeply about our clients and students, including how we may best anticipate their needs and foster their capacity to work to high standards of excellence amid the psychological and physical burdens of increased social distancing, fears about physical safety, and the unique demands created by remote work, or in some cases, direct patient contact in healthcare, all during a global pandemic.

We have considered what our own role is in creating safe spaces that allow people with different lived experiences and beliefs to find common ground and build something productive from there. We have had to adjust our writing process and be more specific and clear with each other in what we can do, and by when, as schedules shift and circumstances change. We have experienced what it is like to practice conscious accountability, with some successes, some failures, and lots of learning along the way.

So, as we are engaged in striving each day to embody the practices of conscious accountability, we are here to support, encourage, and challenge you to do the same as you embark on your own voyage to a more aware, centered, connected, and effective version of yourself.

Our Call to Read Further

In the pages ahead, we will guide you through the ideas, reflections, and actions designed to help you unlock your potential and have a better impact on everyone around you.

In part 1, we define what conscious accountability means and explain why you should rethink traditional notions of accountability. We also explain how conscious awareness is a key differentiator between traditional notions of accountability and conscious accountability, and how conscious accountability is different from transactional ideas about accountability. In part 2, we describe each of the seven practices in detail, including why they are important, barriers that may block your progress, and mindsets and behaviors that allow you to embody each practice. We also illustrate each practice with examples and offer practice exercises for you to try. In part 3, we offer additional tips and inspiration for implementing conscious accountability and encourage you to think about how the world would be different if more people practiced it.

We invite you to make your practice of conscious accountability a part of your life and to make the most of the opportunity that this book offers. We are thrilled to have you along for this journey! Ready? Let's begin.

PART 1

A Different Approach to Accountability

CHAPTER 1

Rethinking Accountability

> *Life doesn't make any sense without interdependence. We need each other, and the sooner we learn that, the better for us all.*
>
> ERIK H. ERIKSON

Josh Hudson was the CEO of his family's manufacturing business, Integrated Solutions Incorporated (ISI). He was an intelligent, capable leader with a gifted capacity to envision the future. He could be very charismatic and persuasive, which helped him negotiate incredible opportunities for the company. After a devastating financial recession, ISI struggled to get back on its feet, plagued by issues of product quality and slow delivery. Josh saw that his team was not working well together. Different departments blamed one another for problems instead of working together to find solutions, and employees and mid-level managers were reluctant to make decisions. As a result, decisions were pushed upward, creating bottlenecks and sluggish response times.

Frustrated by these seemingly intractable problems, Josh recognized that ISI's culture needed to change. He hired a consultant to help the senior management team embrace a new way of working together. During an intensive retreat, the team began to prepare to embark on this culture change initiative. On the last day of the retreat, Josh did not appear. He left a message for one of

the other team members, saying that he needed to fly to Chicago to jump on an important opportunity that he was just made aware of and to go on without him. Josh further reasoned that the team seemed to be working well and was learning the concepts that he had already mastered. And that's when everything unraveled.

In Josh's absence, the team shared with one another how angry, frustrated, and fed up they were with his leadership. They saw this "no-show" behavior as emblematic of how he operated—he did what he thought was best, with no consideration, consultation, or discussion with the team. He was a stickler for following prescribed processes but was the first to break process when it did not suit his immediate objectives. He would frequently override his managers' decisions if he disagreed with them, but sharply berated them or sent scathing emails if they dared to question or challenge his ideas publicly. He also played favorites, leading to resentment and divisions within the company. On one hand, hearing each other's experiences with Josh was very validating for the team. However, they struggled with what to do next. Ultimately, they decided to bring their concerns to Josh directly.

The next week when the team got together for their Monday morning meeting, Josh energetically described his success in pitching a project to the important new customer in Chicago. Then, Martha, the vice president of finance and Josh's cousin, spoke up. She shared the team's disappointment and frustration with Josh for putting this opportunity over the work of the team, of which he was an important member. Others chimed in with examples of how he routinely did things "his way" without regard for other people's ideas or feelings, leading them to feel disempowered and less motivated. Josh sat brooding silently as people spoke, his face turning increasingly red and flushed. Finally, he erupted: "So it's all my fault, is it? Do you know how hard I have worked for this company? We would have been out of business years ago if it weren't for me! You guys are the ones who don't know how to lead, not me. If you don't appreciate what I've done for all of you, then maybe I should just quit and then you'll realize how bad off you are without me!" And he stormed out, slamming the conference room door.

Where did Josh go wrong? How did his strengths and drawbacks as a leader affect the outcomes on his team? Do you have a colleague, business partner, teammate, or company executive like Josh? Have there been times in your life when you wanted to point out that another person had let you down and sought the most constructive, compassionate way to provide this feedback, only to have that person close down or blow up defensively?

Like many business leaders, Josh lacked a certain type of accountability. Let's unpack this. First, Josh did not have a clear understanding of what others wanted or needed from him. Second, he did not appreciate the many ways his behaviors affected others around him, or the ripple effects those actions had throughout the organization. This constricted view made it challenging for Josh to keep in mind others' perspectives and to hear their feedback.

Josh's style as a manager also created certain accountability challenges. At times, he displayed a critical, harsh, top-down way of managing his team. This style inadvertently created an environment of risk aversion, stymied decision making, and inspired a fear of giving or receiving feedback—all of which lowered employee engagement. Alongside this, Josh's reluctance to admit mistakes or claim responsibility for his actions left him and the organization unable to move forward.

ISI's culture change initiative would not be successful unless Josh could display a more nuanced type of accountability and regard for himself, his team, and the organization as a whole.

Why Accountability Matters

Accountability is the focus of this book. So, what is the new, more nuanced definition of accountability that we have been building toward? What do we actually mean when we say "accountability"? And why does accountability matter? Isn't it just another word for being answerable to someone? As long as we keep our heads down and get our work done on time, that means we're accountable, right?

Not quite. Accountability is at the heart of our work and our relationships. Think of accountability as the "secret sauce" that, when present and used well, leads to better results across many different spheres in life. And when it is used poorly or lacking entirely, it can have disastrous consequences.

We will talk more about what conscious accountability means in chapters 2 and 3. But at its core, we think of accountability as meaning *being responsible for your impact*—both the impact that you would like to have and the impact that you actually have. Being responsible for the impact that you would like to have (that is, for your intentions) means making sure you lay the groundwork for success. That includes being clear about the outcome you want to happen and exactly what is needed from you and others to realize it. It also means creating the conditions for you and others to be and do your best. Being accountable for your impact involves being willing to receive feedback about how you affect others and taking responsibility for the results you create through your actions or inactions.

Ultimately, accountability matters for a number of reasons, including the fact that accountability is present all around us, it greatly helps us get things done, and it strengthens trust.

Accountability Is Everywhere

Humans are social creatures. We live in communities and depend on one another for survival. That means the social contracts we make with ourselves and others are essential for our sense of order, safety, and well-being. This interdependence not only keeps us alive, but it also helps us thrive.

In every relationship we have with an individual, group, or organization, there is an accountability equation at play. We need and expect things from others, and they need and expect things from us, even if these mutual expectations are implicit and unspoken. Parents and children expect and need things from one another, but there is usually no formal agreement or contract that they enter into. Whether we acknowledge it or not, relationships are the fabric of the human condition, and therefore accountability is always present and inescapable.

So if accountability is baked into us, it is clear that it is present in how we accomplish any task.

Getting Things Done

Have you ever heard the expression, "If it weren't for the last minute, nothing would get done"? This saying speaks to the importance of deadlines to mobilize people toward completion. Even more motivating, though, can be answering to someone else or having others count on you.

In writing this book, for example, we had to be accountable to each other, to our editors, and to our publisher. And we have used family, friends, and colleagues as accountability partners to help us stay focused and meet our deadlines. Think about the things you are trying to accomplish—how does accountability to other people factor into it? What do others need and expect from you, and vice versa? How might you use the power of those connections to strengthen your own sense of accountability?

The enhanced accountability that human relationships provide is one of the reasons why coaching works. A coach, or someone in the role of a coach, serves as an accountability partner to help us stay true to and follow through with our own agendas. Indeed, there is empirical evidence that coaching helps people attain their goals while simultaneously increasing their resilience and well-being (Grant, Curtayne, and Burton 2009).

That is the power of accountability . . . and it also goes a long way toward building what every good relationship needs: trust.

Building Trust

Trust is arguably the foundation of relationships for individuals, teams, and organizations. Without trust, relationships are at best distant and not especially effective, and at worst they're chaotic, dysfunctional, toxic, or dangerous. Accountability is the active ingredient for making or breaking trust. The relationship between accountability and trust is actually reciprocal: accountability builds trust, while trust allows people to be more accountable. Let's dig deeper into how that works.

We all have different baseline levels of trust, with different people being more or less trusting of others at the outset. Regardless of these baseline levels, trust can be strengthened or weakened by accountability. As future behavior is best predicted by past behavior, people assume (often rightfully) someone's level of trustworthiness based on how they have behaved previously (Ouellette and Wood 1998, Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). So when you do what you say you will do and act responsibly, it strengthens the perception that you're trustworthy. Conversely, if you do not do what you say you will do, it lowers trust. The bottom line is that if you want to build trusting relationships, it behooves you to be accountable.

The presence of trust can also help people engage in some of the behaviors that promote greater accountability. The more we trust other people, the easier it is to communicate more freely and fully—for example, to ask questions, raise concerns, admit mistakes, and give or receive feedback. These behaviors in turn promote a higher degree of accountability.

How does this work in your life? Think of someone in whom you have a high degree of trust. What makes them so trustworthy, reliable, and believable? In what ways have they been accountable in your relationship? How well do they communicate with you? How easy would it be for you to admit your mistakes or wrongdoings to them, or vice versa?

Now, in contrast, reflect on a relationship you have with someone whom you do not particularly trust. Why don't you trust that person? How does their level of accountability in their past behaviors factor into your feelings about them and your assessment of their trustworthiness? And how does this lack of trust affect how fully and freely you are able to communicate with them?

Interestingly, accountability and increased trust translate into better efficiency and cost savings at work. In *The Speed of Trust*, Stephen Covey (2008) argues that there is a direct relationship between trust on the one hand and speed and cost on the other. When trust increases, speed increases and costs go down. In other words, when trust decreases, speed decreases and costs go up, whereas when there is higher trust (for example, you trust that the information you are receiving is accurate), there is less need to double check or seek

additional sources of information, which speeds up the process and ultimately saves money. So accountability breeds trust, and trust leads to efficiency and cost savings.

Being trustworthy can be a huge asset; it makes people more interested in engaging with you, seeing you as good and of value, and wanting to promote you or work or do business with you. Conversely, a bad reputation hinders success on all levels and can be difficult to shift or overcome. Behaving in ways that create accountability and build trust can make a substantial difference in how you are perceived in the world.

The Time Is Now: Accountability Needs an Upgrade

In a traditional sense, we think of accountability as having to answer to, or justify behaviors and actions to, someone else. Governments need to be accountable to their citizens; politicians and lawmakers to their constituents; doctors and teachers to their patients and students; companies to their shareholders and customers; and teams to their leaders or managers.

This conceptualization of accountability places an undue emphasis on the underlying assumption that we answer only to those who have some power to influence or affect our capacity to continue doing our jobs. Citizens in a democracy can reelect or vote out an incumbent leader or party. Boards can remove CEOs or raise their compensation. Patients can file malpractice lawsuits. Customers can stop buying (or buy more) products and services. Team members can be fired or promoted by their managers. In all of these examples, accountability is defined by the potential to lose something should our behavior not measure up.

We refer to this traditional notion of accountability as "accountability 1.0," and it has serious flaws in how we interact with people on a personal and professional level.

Limitations of Accountability 1.0

An obvious limitation to this style of accountability is that it is inherently transactional: If I do what I am supposed to do, I get something I want; if I

do not do it, I receive some negative consequence. It relies on extrinsic motivation, rewards and punishments. This represents a problem because extrinsic motivation is not as powerful and sustainable a form of motivation as intrinsic motivation, which is driven by our deeper needs and values. And all this has crept into the meaning of the word *accountability* itself.

What comes immediately to mind when you think about accountability? In common parlance, we often mean, "Who is to blame? Who should be held responsible?" Holding others accountable, even yourself, can feel like assuming the role of a watchdog or an enforcer who gets people to do things by doling out threats. In this framing, accountability can feel sterile, individualistic, and even punitive. As a result, people being held accountable for something may expect punishment, retribution, or loss of credibility or status if they do not follow through and deliver; the motivation for action is therefore often fear, discomfort, or concern, rather than something more.

Accountability 1.0 can also lead us to ignore or discount stakeholders who may matter greatly but have less immediate power to reward or punish us. We prioritize, or outright ignore, some relationships at the expense of others. For example, more progressive organizations appreciate that employees—not just shareholders and customers—are critical stakeholders to whom employers are accountable. Similarly, healthcare professionals aiming to provide optimal patient care recognize the importance of building partnerships with and seeking input from not only patients but also the other important people in their lives. When our conception of those we are accountable to only extends up the power chain, such as to our boss, we can neglect those we rely on and those who rely on us, such as our teammates and others in the more outer reaches of impact.

In addition, in accountability 1.0 how well we get along and our commitment to the relationship is secondary, perhaps not even considered consciously, in our effort to get the stated job done. If the people we work with do not adequately follow through with a request, they may become defensive or reactive. Similarly, when making the request, we may become entitled or adversarial if the request is not fulfilled. At worst, accountability

can become competitive, resulting in finger pointing and score keeping that drives people apart. In the opening example, Josh immediately heard his employees' complaints as a form of criticism, against which he defended himself strongly.

It is clear that accountability 1.0 fails to inspire our inner motivation, causes us to discount relationships outside a transaction, and de-emphasizes the quality of our relationships. Does relying on threats and depersonalizing our connections with our colleagues sound like the solution? In our opinion, the answer is a resounding, "No!" So what's the alternative to this way of exercising accountability? And what in our current world makes it crucially important that we adopt a more holistic view of accountability?

The Way We Work Is Changing

Consider the following trends in the nature of work, which were present before the COVID-19 pandemic, but have been exacerbated by it:

- **Technology.** Changes in technology continue to revolutionize the way people live and work, such as increased use of artificial intelligence (AI), the proliferation of various digital communication platforms, the use of big data to drive decision making, and increasing reliance on software to conduct our business and run our lives from our phones. On the one hand, these changes can mean greater efficiency and flexibility to run our businesses and our lives. But to the extent that greater use of technology can separate us or reduce humanity in our decision making, how does that affect our sense of accountability? We have observed people expressing themselves on social media in ways that—we suspect—they would never do standing in front of another person. With greater disconnection comes a diminished sense of awareness of others or obligation to them, leading to a lowered sense of accountability.
- **Globalization.** Accompanying these changes in technology is the ability to more easily communicate and share information with

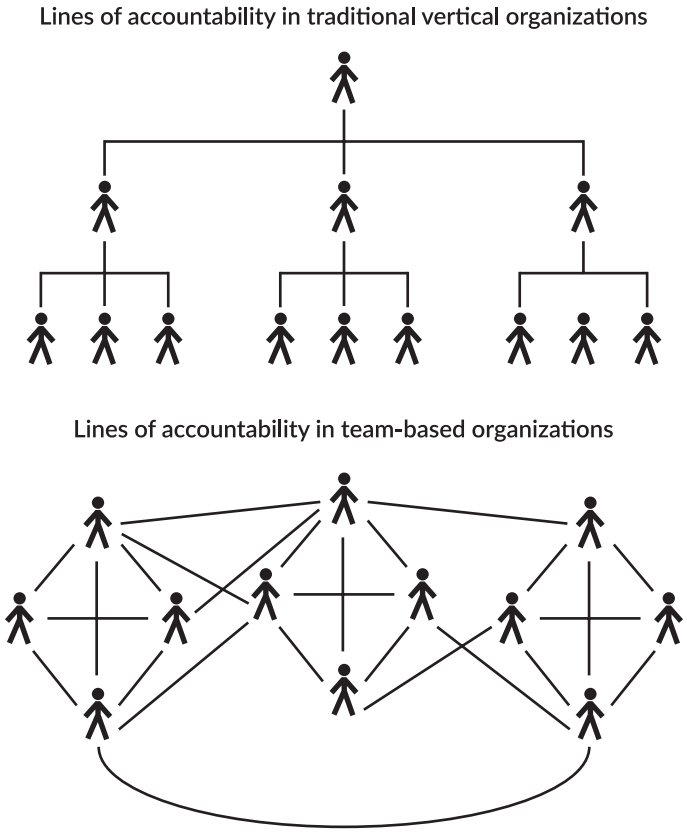
people all over the world. Globalization is reflected in the increase in organizations conducting business on a multinational scale, which includes having customers and employees around the world. To be successful in a global economy, it is important for people to be able to relate to, understand, and engage effectively with people who are culturally different. This poses challenges for accountability, both in terms of managing differences in work styles and managing differences in what it means to be accountable. In fact, the exact meaning of the word *accountability* varies across languages and cultures, ranging from responsibility to promises and vows to control to financial accounts (GEM Report 2017). In one ethnographic study of accountability, participants found it hard to describe what accountability meant, and "the more intent they became on pinning it down the more its meaning seemed to elude them" (Savage and Moore 2004).

- **Remote work.** Another important change is the growth in remote and hybrid workforces. As more business is done around the world, more work is being done from home or at other remote locations. And the outbreak of a pandemic in 2020 dramatically accelerated this trend even among companies and industries that were not previously in favor of it. In 2021, 58.6 percent of US workers were remote, which represented a 159 percent increase since 2009 (Steward 2021). Although working remotely has some compelling benefits for workers (for example, increased productivity, flexibility, and work-life integration), it also has some drawbacks (such as loneliness, challenges in communication and collaboration, and feeling less included in decisions). All these issues make accountability more difficult in remote and hybrid work environments.
- **Diversity, equity, and inclusion.** As movements for racial justice have come to the forefront, gained momentum, and led to improvements

in broader participation, there has been a growing awareness on the part of organizations and employers that they can and should be active in creating change. For example, leaders who promote anti-racist policies recognize the systemic nature of racism and take active steps to dismantle systems of oppression and inequity within their organizations (Liu 2020). The focus on equity in the workplace has become amplified as companies are being called to demonstrate greater transparency around board and executive representation, compensation, hiring, advancement, and other aspects of talent management and organizational life. Accordingly, there will be increasing attention to accountability around implementing and sustaining these changes.

- **Teaming.** Working on a *team* (noun) continues to be important, but in many work contexts, there has been a rise in the need for *teaming* (verb). On a typical team, the membership is relatively stable, such that team members know who is on the team and who is not. In other cases, groups of people come together and work on temporary or short-term projects. In these conditions, having teaming skills—the ability to create strong relationships quickly and coordinate and collaborate with a potentially diverse group of stakeholders—will help build organizations that are able to respond and adapt faster to issues and challenges (Edmondson 2012). While teaming has many benefits, it may also complicate accountability. Within more traditional "vertical" organizations, accountability tends to be simpler, focused primarily between employees and their supervisors. In flat, team-based organizations, accountability occurs both within teams (members being accountable to each other) and across different teams and others laterally. An example of the differences in complexity, with more intersecting lines of accountability in team-based organizations, is shown in Figure 1-1.

Figure 1-1. Lines of Accountability



Humans Are Struggling to Connect

While humans are inherently social in nature, the downside is that our natural ways of building connections at work may feel out of step with the trends in how we work (for example, less in-person and face-to-face interactions, and more communication through email, text, and other media). As a result, job turnover, loneliness, anxiety, depression, burnout, and suicide are on the rise. Growing evidence across disciplines including neuroscience, sociology, social psychology, psychiatry, and mental health suggests the importance of connection and the dangers of loneliness and isolation.

In studying social support and morbidity, Julianne Holt-Lunstad, professor of psychology and neuroscience at Brigham Young University, found that

being socially connected significantly reduced the risk for premature mortality and that lacking social connectedness significantly increased the risk. Moreover, these risks exceed those associated with many other factors that receive substantial public health resources, including obesity, air pollution, smoking, and physical inactivity (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, and Layton 2010).

Data also links a lack of social connectedness to physical and mental health outcomes and limitations in a person's ability to function at work and in relationships. In particular, Generation Z reports higher levels of loneliness and worse mental health overall than other generations (AECF 2021; Bethune 2019). In contrast, people who feel more socially connected to others have lower rates of anxiety and depression, higher self-esteem, increased empathy, and are more trusting and cooperative with others; as a result, others are more trusting and cooperative with them (Seppälä 2014).

Taken together, these findings underscore the importance of creating ways of working together that are not only effective from a task performance, bottom-line perspective, but are also sustainable—in that they also help nurture, support, and foster the growth of the people involved.

We Need Conscious Accountability

It is easy to see how accountability 1.0 is shortsighted, too narrow in its focus, less sustainable and profitable, and adversely affects our well-being. But the concept of accountability itself is not completely to blame. Accountability holds promise as a much more positive, powerful, and universal idea, one that can change us, our relationships, our workplaces, our communities, and indeed our world. We refer to this next evolution of accountability as conscious accountability.

Conscious accountability is a practice of working together in ways that catalyze interpersonal connections and produce excellent task outcomes. In this model, people who are consciously accountable to one another are deeply motivated not just by their shared goals but also by the quality of their relationships with one another. Accountability stems not from fear of reprisal or retribution but from wanting to do right by oneself and others. Awareness

of one's own strengths, weaknesses, intentions, and emotions—and being aware of or curious about those of others—figures prominently in how we practice conscious accountability. Failing to produce is not a black-and-white invitation for reprisal but a learning moment, supported by the relationship that has experienced the lapse in accountability.

Take a moment and imagine working alongside people who you feel strongly connected to and aligned within your common purpose. A group that makes you feel free to be your most authentic self and still fully belong. How wonderful would it be to see yourself achieving remarkable results and fulfilling your mission in a way that allows everyone involved to learn and grow as individuals? Further, wouldn't your experience generate learning and improvement at the group level to bolster your collective capacity to do more and be even more effective together over time? This state of affairs defines what it means to be an effective team and represents the potential that conscious accountability holds (see, for example, Wageman et al. 2014).

In the next chapter, we'll share our understanding of consciousness, why this notion is of vital importance for accountability, and what it means to expand your consciousness.

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About the Authors

David C. Tate is a licensed clinical psychologist, professionally certified coach, and organizational consultant. He is a founder and CEO at Conscious Growth Partners, a boutique consultancy that focuses on helping organizations realize their potential through better relationships, leadership, and teamwork. David has worked with leaders and senior managers in healthcare, financial services, manufacturing, distribution, publishing, media and design, education, human services, technology, and construction.

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David enjoys the daily adventures of being a husband and dad, cooking and laughing over dinner with friends, playing board games with his 15 nieces and nephews, traveling, spending time in the great outdoors, and participating in community theater.

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A creative at heart, Marianne enjoys photography, graphic design, interior design, writing, and calligraphy. She began her academic studies as a film major at Binghamton University and went on to earn a PhD at Hofstra University, studying the impact of writing for her dissertation. You can get a glimpse of her fun-loving competitive nature during family games and at the gym. More often, she loves spending time outside, getting lost in views, and dawdling among the trees.

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Daryn enjoys hiking and swimming. She cherishes time with her beautiful family, as well as more solitary moments spent writing prose or knitting.