



The Oz Principle®

Getting Results Through Individual and Organizational Accountability

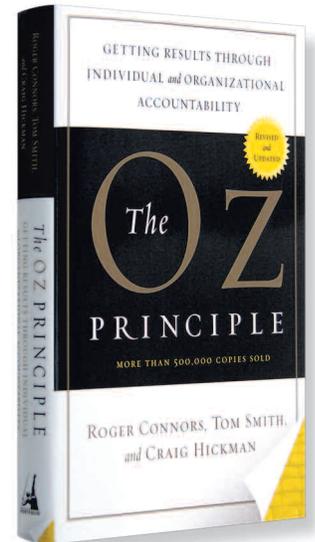
THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Individuals and organizations the world over share the same feelings of anxiety and helplessness that beset the main characters in the story of *The Wizard of Oz*. *The Oz Principle* shows how people use their sense of victimization to justify inaction, excuse ineffectiveness or rationalize poor performance and unwittingly stifle their own progress. The book also demonstrates how people who accept accountability for making things better move beyond their victimization to overcome obstacles, deal with setbacks and rise to new heights. By the end of the journey, readers will not only have learned how to become more accountable for results, they will know how to create organizational cultures that develop and reward the sort of accountability needed to rebuild business character and culture in every job at every level.

This summary details how people and organizations, armed with attitudes of accountability, can overcome the obstacles, excuses and biases that keep them from getting the results they want.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How people and organizations can overcome victim attitudes and behavior and step Above The Line to attain superior performance.
- How to focus on the fundamental cause of poor leadership, low productivity, unacceptable quality, customer dissatisfaction, inadequate innovation, wasted talent, dysfunctional teams or a general lack of accountability.
- How to move beyond explaining why you didn't or can't do better to what you can do to make your future brighter.
- How to improve performance through accountability.



by Roger Connors,
Tom Smith
and Craig Hickman

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE OZ PRINCIPLE®

by Roger Connors, Tom Smith and Craig Hickman

The authors: Roger Connors and Tom Smith are co-founders of Partners In Leadership, Inc., the premier provider of Accountability Training® Services with hundreds of clients around the globe. They also are the co-authors of *Journey to the Emerald City*, a sequel to *The Oz Principle*, and their newest book *How Did That Happen?: Holding People Accountable for Results the Positive, Principled Way*, due out in August 2009. Craig Hickman is co-author of the international bestseller *Creating Excellence* and other business books.

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PART 1 — THE OZ PRINCIPLE®: GETTING RESULTS THROUGH ACCOUNTABILITY

Searching for Greater Accountability in Business

Like all powerful literature, L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* continues to enthrall audiences because its plot strikes a nerve. The book recounts a journey toward awareness; and from the beginning of their journey, the story's main characters gradually learn that they possess the power within themselves to get the results they want.

Until the end, they think of themselves as victims of circumstances, skipping down the yellow brick road to the Emerald City where the supposedly all-powerful Wizard will grant them the courage, heart, wisdom and means to succeed. The journey itself empowers them, and even Dorothy, who could have clicked her red slippers and returned home at any time, must travel the yellow brick road to gain full awareness that only she herself can achieve her desires.

People relate to the theme of a journey from ignorance to knowledge, from fear to courage, from paralysis to powerfulness, from victimization to accountability, because everyone has taken this same journey. Unfortunately, even the most ardent admirers of the story

often fail to learn its simple lesson: Don't get stuck on the yellow brick road; don't blame others for your circumstances; don't wait for wizards to wave their magic wands; and never expect all your problems to disappear. In today's complex environment, the temptation to feel and act like victims has become so pervasive that it has created a very real crisis.

A Thin Line

A thin line separates success from failure, the great companies from the ordinary ones. Below that line lies excuse making, blaming others, confusion and an attitude of helplessness, while above that line we find a sense of reality, ownership, commitment, solutions to problems and determined action. While losers languish Below The Line® preparing stories that explain why past efforts went awry, winners reside Above The Line powered by commitment and hard work.

People and organizations find themselves thinking and behaving Below The Line whenever they consciously or unconsciously avoid accountability for individual or collective results. Stuck in the victim cycle or the blame game, they begin to lose their spirit and resolve until, eventually, they feel completely powerless. Only by moving Above The Line and climbing the Steps To Accountability® can they become powerful again.

The Oz Principle

Accountability, empowerment and employee engagement result from workers and teams who continually ask



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service@summary.com

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Rebecca S. Clement, Publisher; Sarah T. Dayton, Editor in Chief; Andrew Clancy, Senior Editor; Edward O'Neill, Graphic Designer; Chris Lauer, Contributing Editor

the accountability question posed by *The Oz Principle*: “What else can I do to operate Above The Line and achieve the desired results?” When people do that, they learn the secret to getting better results, faster and more cost effectively. As the performance and expectation bar continues to rise, so does the effort it takes to clear the bar.

An attitude of accountability lies at the core of any effort to improve quality, satisfy customers, empower people, build teams, create new products, maximize effectiveness and get results. Whether you confront your own self-diminishing attitudes in your small startup enterprise or in the management ranks of a Fortune 500 firm, you cannot expect to create a better future unless you begin to take the time and find the courage to get Above The Line. ●

Getting Stuck in the Victim Cycle

Imagine a line between accountability and victimization that separates rising above your circumstances to get the results you want from falling into the victim cycle where you can easily get stuck. Neither individuals nor organizations can stay on the line between these two realms because events will inexorably work to push them Below The Line. While both people and organizations can exhibit accountability in some situations yet manifest victim behavior in others, some issue or circumstance will prompt them to think and act either Above The Line or Below The Line.

Even the strongest commitment to accountability will not prevent you from falling Below The Line at one time or another.

People and organizations operating Below The Line consciously or unconsciously avoid accountability for results. Languishing in the victim cycle, they begin to lose their spirit and will continue to do so until eventually they feel powerless, just as the characters did in the land of Oz.

If they choose to continue feeling victimized, they will move through predictable stages in an unending cycle that thwarts individual and organizational productivity: ignoring or pretending not to know about their accountability, claiming it's not their job, ducking their responsibility, blaming others for their predicament, citing confusion as an excuse for inaction, asking others to tell them what to do, claiming that they can't do it,

How a Wait-and-See Attitude Can Lead to Inaction

The senior management team of a \$300 million personal care products manufacturer and marketer found themselves struggling over the production of a new product line. Because the company had grown so rapidly, it lacked clear precedents for such an introduction. After hours of fruitless debate, company officials decided to “wait and see” if the right approach might emerge naturally from the product management group after everyone's emotions cooled down. As months of indecision slipped by, a smaller competitor beat them to the punch, making the whole product introduction problem moot. The wait-and-see stage of the victim cycle often becomes a sinkhole where possible solutions get swallowed up in a swamp of inaction.

developing their story for why they are not at fault and, finally, waiting to see if some hoped-for-miracle will be bestowed by an imaginary wizard.

How to Recognize When You're Below The Line

Whenever you get stuck in the victim cycle, you can't get unstuck until you first acknowledge that you're functioning Below The Line and paying a high price for it. Only with that acknowledgment can you begin assuming a See It attitude that gives you the perspective you need to get Above The Line. Oftentimes, unable to overcome the inertia of the victim cycle on your own, you need feedback from an objective person such as a friend, spouse or customer.

While the victim cycle can be bafflingly complex, there are six basic stages common to most people and organizations:

1. Ignore/Deny. A typical beginning point for those who become ensnared in the victim cycle is the ignore and deny stage where people pretend not to know that there is a problem, remain unaware that the problem affects them or choose to deny the problem altogether.

2. It's Not My Job. This stage reflects an awareness that something needs to be done to get the result, coupled with an acute avoidance of getting involved.

3. Finger-Pointing. In this stage of the victim cycle people deny their own responsibility for poor results and seek to shift the blame to others.

4. Confusion/Tell Me What to Do. At this stage of the victim cycle, people cite confusion as a way of alleviating themselves of their accountability. If they don't understand the problem or the situation, surely they can't be expected to do anything about it.

5. Cover Your Tail. The penultimate stage of the victim cycle is cover your tail, where people continue to seek imagined protection Below The Line by crafting elaborate and precise stories as to why they couldn't possibly be blamed for something that might go wrong.

6. Wait and See. Initially, people remain mired in the victim cycle when they choose to "wait and see" if things will get better. In such a climate, however, problems can only get worse.

Every situation is different, every person is unique, but everyone reaches a critical moment when he or she recognizes having been stuck in the victim cycle. Every human being can fall Below The Line from time to time, but whenever you do so, you can't get back on track until you first acknowledge that you're incurring a high cost for functioning Below The Line. That's when you begin assuming a See It attitude that gives you the perspective you need to get Above The Line and start climbing the accountability ladder. ●

Accountability Begins by Clearly Defining Results

Consider the following new definition of accountability, one that embodies the essence of *The Oz Principle*:

Accountability: A personal choice to rise above one's circumstances and demonstrate the ownership necessary for achieving desired results — to See It, Own It, Solve It and Do It.

This definition includes a mindset or attitude of continually asking, "What else can I do to rise above my circumstances and achieve the results I desire?" It involves a process of seeing it, owning it, solving it and doing it, and requires a level of ownership that includes making, keeping and answering for personal commitments. Such a perspective embraces both current and future efforts rather than reactive and historical explanations. Armed with this new definition of accountability, you can help yourself and others do everything possible to both overcome diffi-

cult circumstances and achieve desired results.

The Oz Principle's definition of accountability emphasizes the fact that accountability works best when people share ownership for circumstances and results. The old definition of accountability leads people to assign individual responsibility without acknowledging the shared accountability that so often characterizes organizational behavior and modern life.

Climbing the Steps To Accountability

The universally applicable Steps To Accountability — See It, Own It, Solve It and Do It — weave the tapestry of every business success scenario, without exception.

It takes time, effort, commitment and sometimes even emotional trauma to get onto the Steps To Accountability and stay there, but, after experiencing life Above The Line, no individual or organization wants to return to the blame game.

You can improve your own ability to remain Above The Line by watching for the following clues that indicate accountable attitudes and behavior:

- You invite candid feedback from everyone about your own performance.
- You never want anyone, including yourself, to hide the truth from you.
- You readily acknowledge reality, including all its problems and challenges.
- You don't waste time or energy on things you cannot control or influence.
- You always commit yourself 100 percent to what you are doing, and if your commitment begins to wane, you strive to rekindle it.
- You own your circumstances and your results, even when they seem less than desirable.
- You recognize when you are dropping Below The Line and act quickly to avoid the traps of the victim cycle.
- You delight in the daily opportunity to make things happen.
- You constantly ask yourself the question, "What else can I do to rise above my circumstances and get the results I want?"

When you think and act in these ways you're functioning Above The Line. Rising above your circumstances to get the results you seek is the soul of *The Oz Principle*, just as it was the empowering theme in L. Frank Baum's land of Oz. ●

PART 2 — THE POWER OF INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTABILITY: MOVING YOURSELF ABOVE THE LINE®

Mustering the Courage to See It®

According to Andrew S. Grove, chairman of Intel, every company faces a critical point when it must change dramatically to rise to the next level of performance. If the company fails to see and seize that moment, it will start to decline. The key is courage.

How Feedback Improves Your Ability to See It

Acknowledging reality and seeing things as they really are allows you to escape the feelings of powerlessness that accompany Below The Line behavior and rise above those circumstances by addressing what you can do to overcome challenges and obstacles. That usually requires getting feedback from others. You can gain great insight from frequent, regular and ongoing feedback from other people. Although it can cause a great deal of pain and embarrassment at times, honest input helps create the accurate picture of reality that lies at the core of accountability. Since no one individual can mandate a perfectly accurate description of reality, you must draw from many other people's perceptions to imbue your reality with the deepest possible understanding of its many hues and shades. Accountable people constantly seek feedback from a wide range of associates, be they friends, family, business partners, consultants or other advisers. Remember, other people's perceptions of reality, whether you agree with them or not, always add important nuances to your own perception. The more perspectives you obtain, the more easily you can recognize when you're stuck Below The Line, move Above The Line and then encourage others to do likewise.

Finding the Heart to Own It®

Owning your circumstances depends on seeing both the victim and the accountable sides of a story. You should therefore begin your assessment by identifying a current situation in which you feel victimized and taken advantage of or otherwise find yourself languishing Below The Line. If you can't think of a current situation, consider a past one, choosing a story from your work, home, personal or social life. Once you have selected your story, create a self-assessment form by list-

ing facts that describe why you feel or felt victimized or taken advantage of. Try to list the victim facts of your story in a way that will persuade someone else that you really weren't at fault.

Most people quite naturally focus on the facts that make them feel victimized or taken advantage of while screening out the accountable facts that support their own role in creating their circumstances. Therefore, in Part 2 of the Own It Self-Assessment, you want to move beyond such filtering, focusing instead on the accountable facts of your story, that is, the other version of your story where you delineate your own actions or inactions that contributed to your circumstances. The following five questions will help guide your assessment:

1. Can you cite the most convincing point of the "other side of the story" that "they" are telling?
2. If you wished to warn someone in similar circumstances not to make the same mistakes, what would you tell them?
3. What facts did you choose to ignore?
4. What facts should you add to the story that you have left out?
5. What would you do differently if you faced this situation again?

Own Your Circumstances

You do not want to remain in the victim cycle. People who own their circumstances never allow the actions of someone or something else to keep them stuck Below The Line. Instead, accountable people accept whatever ways in which their own behavior contributed to the situation and set about overcoming those circumstances, no matter how difficult.

The benefits of owning your circumstances more than compensate for the heart-wrenching effort involved. When you find the heart to own your circumstances, you automatically gain the commitment to overcome and change those circumstances for the better. ●

Obtaining the Wisdom to Solve It®

The third dimension of accountability is the ability to Solve It. Simply acknowledging reality and accepting your role in creating your circumstances will achieve little if you fail to tackle real problems and remove true obstacles on your road to results. To do so, you must exercise wisdom.

Attaining the Third Step Above The Line

Getting to the Solve It step quickly can often make all the difference in the world. Solving It can begin even before you fully take the step.

So what does Solving It look like to the victim of a tough industry, an economic downturn or a massive lay-off that doesn't care who gets in the way? First, it begins with preparation, particularly if you work in a sector prone to swings in employment. It includes becoming "professionally nimble" and preparing yourself for the three-career life where an occasional job change is more the norm than the exception. It means keeping up on your technical skills with continuing education, networking with people outside of your industry and making sure you've set aside a nest egg that will help smooth such a transition.

The wisdom to Solve It includes anticipating what could occur and preparing for the worst. When it does come, moving quickly to the Solve It step can make a huge difference.

The Solve It attitude and behavior stem from continually asking the question, "What else can I do?" By constantly and rigorously asking this question, you avoid slipping back into the victim cycle whenever certain events occur that would otherwise seem to block the road to results. Since solutions to thorny problems often do not readily reveal themselves, you must diligently search for them, but beware of wasting time Below The Line because that will only dull your senses and discourage your imagination from discovering solutions.

The Solve It Skills

The following skills provide a solid foundation for an assessment of your own ability to move from See It and Own It to Solve It:

1. Stay Engaged. Stay engaged in the process of finding solutions. Don't focus on what can't be done and, as a result, stop looking for and thinking about creative alternatives.

2. Persist. As one leader said, "That which we persist in doing becomes easier for us to do; not that the nature of the thing itself is changed, but that our power to do is increased."

3. Think Differently. The same thinking that got you into the problem won't get you out of it. Always solicit and strive to understand perspectives other than your own.

4. Create New Linkages. Many solutions require

innovative approaches that tap into new ways of both thinking about and doing things. Often, such approaches involve forging new relationships with others you may not have previously considered to offer keys to the solution.

5. Take the Initiative. The Solve It step requires that you assume full accountability for discovering solutions that will ultimately deliver desired results. Such solutions generally come only when you take the initiative to explore, search and question even after you think you have done everything you can. Understanding that others often do not share the same level of ownership or desire to achieve your goal, you must take the initiative to get the result.

6. Stay Conscious. Pay attention to everything that may relate to potential solutions. Always challenge current assumptions and beliefs to break through to a new level of thinking ●

Exercising the Means to Do It®

Ultimately, personal accountability means accepting full responsibility to achieve results and Do It. If you don't Do It, you'll never reap the most valuable benefit of full accountability: overcoming your circumstances and achieving the results you want. Despite the many benefits that accrue from applying the other three steps, results only come when you put all four steps together and passionately, proactively and persistently Do It!

The Do It step bestows accountability, not just for activities, circumstances or feelings but for future accomplishment. When you combine the notion of accountability with the objective of accomplishing better results, you create an empowering and guiding beacon for both personal and organizational activity. This form of accountability comes after you have progressed through all four steps Above The Line. By stopping at any step short of Do It, you may, for a time, keep yourself out of the victim cycle and the blame game, but you will never fully achieve a permanent position Above The Line. Any effort that falls short of making it happen and getting it done simply indicates a lack of full acceptance of accountability.

Diligence, Perseverance and Vigilance

Accountability is a process, and you can fall into the victim cycle just as easily from the fourth step as from any of the others. Staying Above The Line requires diligence, perseverance and vigilance. It also requires a willingness to accept risk and to take the giant step that's often necessary to get what you want out of your life or

your organization. Fear of failing can so debilitate many people that they build walls between Solve It and Do It. However, only by accepting the risk can you penetrate the walls and break down all the barriers to success.

In the final analysis, Do It means embracing your full responsibility for results and remaining answerable for your progress toward those results, regardless of how or why you managed to get into your current situation. ●

PART 3 — RESULTS THROUGH COLLECTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY: HELPING YOUR ORGANIZATION PERFORM ABOVE THE LINE®

Mastering Above The Line® Leadership

Organizations today demand the best from their leaders. You can't just hit the numbers anymore. You must do it ethically, honestly and in a manner that proves your concern for everyone around you.

In a survey of 726 corporate directors conducted by Korn/Ferry, the international executive recruiting and organizational consulting firm, respondents indicated they would be more likely to remove a chief executive officer for leadership flaws than for poor financial returns. This increasing emphasis on effective leadership at the top has been reinforced by the power shift taking place in most organizations in which senior executives seek to spread decision-making authority more widely to the lowest levels of the enterprise. As a result, Above The Line leadership will increasingly become a requirement, not merely an advantage, for most organizations.

How to Apply the Right Touch

Effective leaders like the legendary Jack Welch strive to keep themselves and their organizations climbing the Steps To Accountability, applying a delicate, and yet determined, touch whenever they or others momentarily fall Below The Line. The following list identifies ways in which you can apply the right touch in your organization:

- Constantly ask yourself the question, “What else can I do?” to achieve the result you desire.
- Always urge your people to ask the same question: “What else can I do?”
- Invite people to give you feedback on whether or not they perceive you operating Above The Line

on a particular issue.

- Provide honest, yet encouraging, feedback to others when they drop Below The Line.
- Actively observe activities and offer coaching, rather than wait for others to report on their progress on any given project or assignment. Never delay reporting progress to your own superiors.
- Focus your discussions on things that you and others can control and do rather than on the uncontrollables. Acknowledge when you fall Below The Line and do not react defensively when others give you feedback.

Once you master these traits and personally exhibit and model Above The Line behavior yourself, you can begin successfully coaching others to do likewise.

Leading From Above The Line

With effective Above The Line leadership skills you can begin moving your entire organization to higher levels of accountability. Before you move on, however, take a moment to consider how long Dorothy and her companions took to come to the realization that they possessed the power within themselves to accomplish what they wanted.

Glinda, the good witch, wisely provided the right kind of coaching and assistance to Dorothy and her friends throughout their journey. As an Above The Line leader, you should apply your leadership in ways that will help people and groups in your organization make progress. Serving as a model, recognizing when to intervene and when to step back, focusing on the controllables, coaching people Above The Line and accounting for progress make anyone a better Above The Line leader. ●

Getting Your Entire Organization Above The Line®

Once you have made the choice to “be” accountable, you then can take steps to assist others in their journey Above The Line. Such a choice represents the ultimate application of accountability. Regardless of your current position in your organization, you can begin to promote The Oz Principle by encouraging people to climb out of the victim cycle and ascend the Steps To Accountability. The entire organization can benefit from what you've learned: your superiors, your subordinates, your peers and all the stakeholders both inside and outside your organization.

Key Activities

The following are five of the key activities that will substantially improve an organization's ability to create and sustain a culture of accountability. With these activities, you can build accountability into the very fabric of your organization:

- 1. Training everyone, at every level.** The first crucial challenge to creating greater accountability is training everyone from the boardroom to the mailroom to understand the crucial relationship between accountability and results.
- 2. Coaching accountability.** No organization can consistently function Above The Line without constant feedback. Continuous feedback must become a living, breathing part of the accountable organization's culture.
- 3. Asking Above The Line questions.** Questions like "What aspects of this situation will most likely pull us Below The Line in the future?" and "What can we control and what can't we control in this situation?" help flesh out the reality of the situation.
- 4. Rewarding accountability.** If you want accountability to become a lasting and important part of your own organization's culture, you must consciously foster accountability throughout the inner workings of every aspect of your organization.
- 5. Holding people accountable.** In the end, personal accountability means that individuals choose to See It, decide to Own It, personally work to Solve It and then individually commit to Do It.

These activities serve as the underpinnings to any successful organizational effort to create a culture of accountability.

Recall the journey along the yellow brick road. After the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodsman and the Lion had mastered accountability for themselves, they found others eager to benefit from their personal gains. Likewise, as you work to keep yourself and others Above The Line, you will undoubtedly find more chances to apply *The Oz Principle* to your organization's toughest issues. ●

The Unending Journey

At the end of the story of *The Wizard of Oz*, each of the characters has overcome their own difficult circumstances and has achieved their objective. They got results because they asked themselves "What else can I do?"

10 More Above The Line® Questions

1. What aspects of this situation will most likely pull us Below The Line in the future?
2. What can we control and what can't we control in this situation?
3. Have we fallen Below The Line?
4. What are we pretending not to know about our accountability?
5. Which areas of joint accountability may allow us to drop the ball?
6. If we really "owned it," what would we do differently?
7. Given recent decisions, what do we need to do to ensure the organization stays Above The Line?
8. Does anyone involved with this situation still fail to "own" the decisions we have already made?
9. Who is accountable for achieving the result and in what time frame?
10. What have we learned from our recent experience that we can apply as we move forward?

then answered that question with solutions that transcended the obstacles and demonstrated true personal ownership and investment. Each discovered that they had all along possessed the power to move Above The Line and get the result.

The message of *The Oz Principle*: Only when you assume full accountability for your thoughts, feelings, actions and results can you direct your own destiny; otherwise someone or something else will.

There's a lot to learn in Oz. Enjoy the lifelong journey. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *The Oz Principle*, you'll also like:

1. ***The Heart of Change* by John Kotter and Dan Cohen.** The most effective change happens when you engage the see-feel-change dynamic that fuels action.
2. ***First Break All the Rules* by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman.** Great managers know that conventional wisdom about human nature does not hold up. Learn what great managers do differently.
3. ***Reengineering the Corporation* by Michael Hammer and James Champy.** Here's how to make quantum leaps in performance by analyzing and redesigning your work practices.