

# THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO REJUVENATING UNDERPERFORMERS

**GREG BUSTIN**

# Praise for Greg Bustin's leadership books

"If you're looking for new ways to drive accountability and improve individual and organizational performance, read this book."

Dan Pink, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Drive* and *When*

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"Exceptional leaders are lifelong learners, and Greg has collected, organized, and presented these leadership lessons to stimulate learning, inform decision-making, and inspire action."

Elizabeth Bryant, Chief Learning Officer, Southwest Airlines

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"Greg's practical style brings to life situations leaders face daily, and his book provides the thought-provoking techniques to help leaders make the big calls."

Steve Dalton, OBE, Managing Director, SONY UK Technology Centre

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"Each person holds so much power within themselves that needs to be let out. Sometimes they just need a little nudge, a little direction, a little support, a little coaching, and the greatest things can happen."

# Greg Bustin delivers exceptional business results.

He's worked with the leadership teams at Bank of America, Burger King, Fujitsu, PepsiCo, Nucor, Quaker, 7Up, Sony, Stetson and Verizon as well as with teams at mid-sized companies looking for a spark to reignite their business and with start-ups looking to manage profitable growth.

He's a sought-after speaker on the topic of Accountability, having delivered more than 500 talks on five continents.

He's led more than 200 strategic planning sessions and has conducted more than 4,000 one-on-one coaching sessions with CEOs, presidents and partners as well as with rising stars who are making their mark on their companies and those they lead.

He's dedicated a career to working with leaders all over the world, and he's developed a collection of resources that will guide and inspire any leader, including:



# An Insider's Guide to Rejuvenating Underperformers

Someone on your team isn't performing.

Is it time for this person to go?

Think twice before you say "yes."

Because the person who isn't performing might be you.

As leaders, we get the behavior we tolerate. And when it comes to accountability, we're often our own worst enemy.

On the front end of the accountability spectrum, we think we've been clear about setting and communicating expectations when we haven't. We believe we've paved the way for high performance when there are barriers—some real, some imaginary—that make it difficult for people to perform at their best. Or we've failed to establish reasonable checkpoints for coaching, correcting and learning long before we're surprised by a missed deadline or shoddy work.

On the back end of the accountability spectrum—when we've observed the pattern of underperformance for some time—we accept excuses that sound logical even when we know better. We allow emotions to cloud our decision-making. We delay having a conversation with an underperformer because it's easier to avoid what we anticipate will be a difficult conversation than having one. Instead of practicing accountability, we practice avoidance.

All of these shortcomings—and others like them—are the responsibility of the leader, not the person who's underperforming.

That was certainly the case with me. Despite achieving record financial results year over year, the firm I founded and led could have accomplished more. Our decision-making about employee performance would've been clearer, our work product would've been better, our clients would've been happier and our profits would've been healthier. There would have been more fun and less drama if I knew then what I know now about accountability and the best ways of addressing underperformers.

So before we blame others we first need to look in the mirror.

Before jumping to conclusions we need to approach the situation from the mindset that it's our responsibility to understand what's causing the underperformance. We owe it to those we supervise to determine if it's possible to rejuvenate them and then help them get their performance back on track. Or to make a change so they can be more productive and happier.

If you're a leader, you're a coach. Accountability, after all, should be more about coaching than castigating.

## A NEW WAY TO THINK ABOUT ACCOUNTABILITY

### The "A" word can be intimidating.

One reason the mere mention of "accountability" is threatening stems from the way we think and talk about it.

Just saying the word conjures all sorts of negative images: micromanagement; an emotional, mean-spirited conversation; punishment. It can be all of those things, but it doesn't have to be any of them.

Accountability has its roots in record-keeping activities related to moneylending systems first developed in ancient Israel, Babylon, Egypt, Greece, and, later, Rome. In this sense, accountability is concerned with settling up accounts. Moneylenders would hold people to account—to expect repayment of what had been borrowed.

Over time, the idea of holding a person to account morphed into holding a person accountable. The phrase "holding you accountable" conveys an idea of leverage, or an advantage. To an extent, that idea is true. But if the bargain is fair, each person has leverage on the other. Each person trades something—money for work, convenience for time, power for prestige, responsibility for authority. In any bargain, one of the parties must first give something of value to the second party. The first party does so out of a sense of trust: If trust were absent the transaction would not take place. To complete the bargain, the second party chooses to agree to the terms of the deal; the second party now has the responsibility to complete their side of the bargain. They've given their word they will do so. Whether or not they fulfill their commitment is whether or not they are accountable.

Today, the word accountability has become shorthand for some type of punitive action—something the aggrieved person will do to the other person who has not met the terms of the accountability contract. Over time, what's become forgotten, obscured or ignored is that both parties made a choice, including the second person who accepted the bargain knowing they'll be penalized for failing to meet the terms of the contract.

In most business dealings, we accept these terms as being necessary and practical.

The accountability problem facing most of us, however, occurs in the workplace with our colleagues.

When colleagues don't meet the agreed-upon terms of workplace agreements they make with one another, the aggrieved party often moves quickly to DEFCON 1—immediate nuclear retaliation. Why isn't there first an attempt to understand what's causing the problem? Why isn't genuine concern expressed for the other person's inability to meet their commitment? Instead of asking *What's causing the underperformance?* and *How can we support you?* we say in our most threatening voice *If you don't fix this (whatever this is) immediately, you're in big trouble.* The underperformer is thinking *Really? How many times have I heard that and nothing bad has happened? Too many times to count.*

If an experience similar to this has occurred between you and an underperformer, the underperformer knows you're upset. They also know that your past handling of similar incidents—with them, at least—is mostly talk and little action.

Face it: the real reason you're upset and the reason your reaction to underperformance so often tends to be emotional, adversarial or caustic is because, frankly, you're upset with yourself for not having been 100% clear about any number of things, starting with exactly what you wanted, when you wanted it and what would happen if your expectations were not met. Or you're beginning to realize the person is not capable of completing the assignment so you're upset for assigning them a task that's beyond their competency. Or you're upset you didn't verify the underperformer's claim when you were told that *Everything's fine.* You're upset because everything's not fine, there's no time to fix the problem and you're about to look bad to your colleagues, your customer, your boss, your bank or your board.

You're upset with yourself because you've tolerated these excuses for weeks, for months—sometimes for years—without addressing the real reasons the underperformance is occurring.

You're upset with yourself because you're wondering where you'll finally draw the line with this person and their behavior and say *Enough!*

We delay having what we believe must surely be a difficult conversation. We dread this conversation. We fear these types of conversations because the timing occurs most often when both parties have lost hope: The boss has lost hope the underperformer can be rehabilitated, and the underperformer has lost hope there's nothing to be done to save their job.

**If you really want people to perform at their best and drive your organization to new levels of performance, start thinking about accountability in a new way.**

Start with this: the concept of "holding people accountable" has about as much appeal as "holding people hostage." In some people's minds, accountability is synonymous with finger-pointing, the blame game, punishment and micromanagement. This way of thinking is what gives accountability a bad rap.

Perhaps the first person who needs rejuvenating is you.

Take a fresh look at accountability and start thinking about it as a support system for winners that's built on trust. When you make commitments with someone, talk openly about what must happen for expectations to be met. Discuss the positive impact—to you, to them, to others—of completing the task as expected. Also discuss the negative impact of expectations not being met. Change your perspective by owning some of the responsibility. Ask *What help do you need from me to be successful?*

As you're reminding yourself that accountability is a two-way street, make certain your colleagues know they can count on you as the leader to do what you have promised them. How would those around you rate your ability and willingness to remove the barriers standing in their way? What's your record of providing the resources—training, people, time, money—to complete the assignment? How would those around you rate your reputation of keeping your promises?

Accountability is a contract, a commitment, a personal promise.

What most people don't appreciate is that accountability is less about carrots and sticks and more about relationships forged on purpose and trust.

Ask yourself: Do we as an organization walk our talk?

## YOU CAN'T MOTIVATE PEOPLE

In 2009, in the depths of the worldwide recession, I began my research about accountability by interviewing senior leaders at many of the world's most admired companies, including The Container Store, Ernst & Young, Herman Miller, Nucor, Sony, Southwest Airlines and Marriott. I expanded my research by interviewing CEOs and their teams at dozens of small and mid-sized companies who were out-performing their competitors.

I was granted insider status at these high-performing companies to understand how successful organizations approach accountability as a tool to develop their star performers and rejuvenate their underperformers.

I supported my findings from these interviews with data I gathered from more than 8,000 executives worldwide. Each week I continue to collect more data and more anecdotes.



Leaders at these most admired companies agreed that the foundation of high performance is leadership, which establishes, nurtures and sustains corporate culture. In describing their approach to culture, high performance and accountability, they used phrases such as, "It's not rocket science," "You've heard this before," and "It's really pretty simple."

"Life," said Leonardo da Vinci, "is pretty simple. You do some stuff. Most fails. Some works. You do more of what works. If it works big, others quickly copy it. Then you do something else. The trick is the doing something else."

High-performing organizations understand their "something else" is their culture.

Your organization's culture—whether it's one built on accountability, or one built on excuses—determines the performance of the vast majority of your employees. High performers are driven to achieve goals. Employees whose performance falls in the bottom 10% of your organization will continue to evade accountability and likely never change, so you'll need a systematic process for moving them out of the organization where they can find work that suits their skills and their passions. It's the vast majority of your workforce—the 70% or so of your employees comprising the bell curve in the middle—whose performance rises or falls based on the culture of the enterprise.

The insights I gained about culture, coaching and accountability are included in my book [\*Accountability: The Key to a High-Performance Culture\*](#) (McGraw-Hill) and some of those insights are included here to guide you through the concepts, steps and questions related to rejuvenating an underperformer.

Be advised: You cannot motivate your employees.

You can incent their behavior, but you cannot incent their passion.

Motivation comes from within and is driven by an individual's passion. Yes, you can motivate someone for short periods of time through near-term rewards or fear, but sustaining motivation in another person is a difficult proposition. Besides, a fear-based culture is observable by your top performers who will decide at some point this type of culture is toxic and then leave.

To drive high performance, people need to know what you expect them to do and what's in it for them. Most of the time it's money, but it can also be other forms of fulfillment.

Leaders of the most admired companies I interviewed each used slightly different hiring filters to ensure they hired the candidate that best fit their culture. A component shared by all is the promise the candidate's experience with their organization will be fulfilling to them. The Container Store hires great people who want to work with other winners. The hiring practice at two national not-for-profit organizations proves that people are willing to earn a bit less in exchange for contributing to a cause they found meaningful. And Southwest Airlines accepts only those people who are eager to rally around the company's mission of connecting people to what matters most in their lives.

Scientific data derived from Maslow's hierarchy of needs identify six motivators that drive people to high levels of performance, sometimes sacrificing other benefits along the way. The six drivers, in no particular order, are:

- Economic—an interest in money
- Regulatory—an interest in tradition, process and order
- Political—an interest in power, though not necessarily politics
- Theoretical—an interest in learning, logic and reason
- Aesthetic—an interest in form and harmony
- Social—an interest in helping people

Great leaders understand what motivates top talent and offer their support so that people are energized, deployed effectively and fulfilled.

When Vince Lombardi became coach of the Green Bay Packers, he inherited a team that had won only one game the previous season despite having a roster loaded with six future Hall of Fame players and five future Pro Bowlers. He transformed a group of losers into a dynasty of champions. "Coaches who can outline plays on a blackboard are a dime a dozen," Lombardi said. "It is essential to understand that battles are primarily won in the hearts of men."

Your job as a leader is to put people in a position to win. Your leadership is tested and measured by your ability to develop and nurture a culture where your employees' passions are unleashed in their workplace activities in pursuit of a shared goal. Individual goals are achieved by achieving the shared goal.

There are five questions every employee wants answered:

**1. Why Are We here?**

**5. Where can I go for help?**

**2. What is expected of me?**

**4. What's in it for me?**

**3. How am I doing?**

Your employees already ask these questions of themselves, so why not find out directly from them what they're thinking? These five questions would make an effective, low-cost employee survey. My experience running dozens of these surveys is that the responses you receive will surprise you.

Here are a few guidelines to follow with any survey you decide to conduct:

- You must release the results of the survey
- Announce no more than three findings: typically one strength and two weaknesses
- Link the findings to your core values, and frame the weaknesses as opportunities to improve in a particular area
- Announce the action to be taken based on the findings, including who will lead the change initiative, the deadline for completion, and the expected benefits to the organization and its employees

Armed with the knowledge that motivation comes from within, don't try to motivate your colleagues. Seek instead to inspire them. Ask yourself:

- What's my inspiring vision for the organization? (You can include financial targets, but your vision must give people something to cheer for.)
- Is our vision big enough to include everyone in our organization?
- Is it bold enough to excite everyone?
- Have I placed people in the best positions to win based on their talent and passions?

A great culture isn't defined by perks. A great culture is defined by growth—individual development and organizational evolution. When people are doing work they love at a company they believe in and they trust their boss to have their best interests at heart, accountability—and any culture that nurtures it—will look, sound and feel like coaching.

Ben Franklin's advice that "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" applies here. When you inspire, coach and encourage your employees, you'll find they are rejuvenated every day by the work they do as part of achieving a common goal that means something to them.

## **WHAT YOUR BEST EMPLOYEES WANT**

In high-performing enterprises, the organization's values are their rules of engagement. Tracking performance is their scoreboard. And the leaders are coaches.

Clarity is a great motivator. Ambiguity is a great de-motivator, at least to your high-performing employees.

In my book *Accountability* I devote an entire chapter to concepts, case studies and questions related to tracking performance.

Why? Because tracking performance:

- Helps you forecast results and modify behavior to get more of the results you want
- Is your mechanism for communicating clearly and unambiguously the performance occurring at the enterprise, business unit, departmental and individual levels
- Removes much of the subjectivity, emotion and excuses associated with underperformance by allowing facts to speak for themselves
- Is what your best employees want: they want to know how they're doing against their individual objectives and they want to know how their performance is helping the organization achieve its larger objectives

Ask your employees what Key Performance Indicators they believe should be tracked. Those conversations will be helpful to you as you learn what matters to others in the organization. Those conversations will be helpful to your employees as you help them connect what they're doing to the goals of the organization and the benefits they receive for achieving those goals. The key to *what* and *how* you track is making certain your employees understand *why* you're tracking performance.

If you use tracking as a stick that's wielded to drive performance, you are a fool with a tool.

If however, you believe—and, just as important, your employees believe—tracking helps people make better decisions, improve performance, and celebrate milestones, then tracking will be an essential component in your quest to drive accountability at every level of your organization.

When you've decided on the items to track, make sure you make those KPIs visible for everyone to see. Because:

- 65% of the world's population learns visually—that's two of every three of your employees
- 90% of information transmitted to the brain is visual
- Scoreboarding is a process that's 60 times faster than words
- Visuals are 400% more effective than words: they trigger powerful emotions
- Everyone has equal access to see how their team is performing

People do their best work when they know they'll be given credit for their contribution. That's why tracking is not punishment, it's empowerment. Tracking is not focused on saying *This is what happens if you don't do something*. Instead, the focus is *See what's possible if you do your best*.

## Tracking does the heavy lifting of accountability.

## GET CLEAR ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS

Even with a culture that emphasizes results over activity, even with clear expectations and visible tracking that makes performance visible, there may still be some colleagues who are not performing.

### So how do you coach these employees to achieve the results you're expecting? How many chances do you give an underperformer?

A lot of variables go into deciding how many chances to give someone to improve. There's no bumper-sticker slogan, no one-size-fits-all answer, and even top-performing companies have been known to hold onto underperforming employees. But rarely for too long.

When determining how many chances to give underperformers, leaders at high-performing companies are guided by the following factors:

- The organization's core values that articulate ideal behaviors
- Clear, consistent performance expectations
- Eliminating the *reasons* for underperformance (thus clearing the way for the performance you expect); *excuses* are not accepted
- A belief that terminating an underperformer is the final step after everything possible was done to help the person succeed

The exceptions to these guidelines should be obvious: if a person lies, cheats or steals, they have sealed their own fate and immediate termination is the only appropriate response.

"The hardest thing about accountability," an executive told me, "is consistent performance evaluation. If you are not consistent with how you're communicating expectations or you're not consistent in evaluating performance, it will tear down the fabric of your culture."

Clarity about what you stand for will guide you through these conversations and decisions. Your core values help you make the decisions you don't want to make: you may not like the answer, but when you're being true to your values the answer will be clear.

One of the toughest decisions you'll make as a leader is determining how to address employees who deliver great results but disregard your values. These people are cancers to your entire organization. What's more, their behavior—both good and bad—is usually so ingrained it's unlikely any meaningful change will occur. You have a choice to make.

I once hired a person to supervise a team working on two of our firm's important clients. Her work was stellar. She produced great results. Clients loved her. But she terrorized her staff. When I failed to address this behavior, I suspected that everyone in my firm believed one of three things: that I was clueless about what was happening, that I didn't care, or that I was

scared to take the necessary action out of fear for what would happen with her clients. Clueless, careless, spineless: three bad traits.

After speaking repeatedly with her about her behavior and offering her outside coaching, I realized she would not—perhaps could not—change. She simply was not coachable. Her next outbreak of verbal abuse to a colleague caused her to lose her job. My phone calls to her clients who had never observed her rude behavior were difficult, but the clients supported my decision. Had I failed to take appropriate action, the people she supervised eventually would have left our firm, and doing nothing would've undermined my credibility among those who knew all too well what was happening.

In most instances of underperformance, however, when you see material changes in someone's performance—whether it's a top performer or an average performer—you'll first need to figure out what's happening in their life to account for the drop-off in their performance. When a pattern of underperformance emerges answer these 12 questions *before* scheduling the conversation:

1. As the underperformer's supervisor, what is my role in the problem?
2. Does the underperformer know what I think of their performance? (If not, see #1.)
3. Is the underperformer coachable? Is the behavior a matter of skill (ability) or will (attitude)?
4. Is there a hill (a barrier) the organization has placed in the person's way?
5. What is the underperformance costing us? (Hint: It's more than time and money.)
6. What's the ideal outcome?
7. What's the likelihood this ideal outcome can be achieved?
8. Have I done everything in my power to make it work, or is there something else I can do that I've not yet tried?
9. How much of myself am I willing to invest in helping the underperformer get back on track?
10. What's my deadline for resolving the issue?
11. What's my Plan B if the issue is not resolved?
12. How committed am I to execute the plan if the performance isn't back on track by the deadline we establish? (This is my personal accountability moment of truth.)

Once you're clear on the answers, schedule a conversation with the underperformer.

# YOUR CONVERSATION WITH UNDERPERFORMERS



## THE ICEBERG CONVERSATION

Less than 20 percent of an iceberg is above the water's surface and visible.

To address underperformance, you and the underperformer must figure out what's happening below the surface, the part you—and perhaps even the underperformer—may not be able to see or fully appreciate. What cannot be seen cannot be fixed.

The purpose of the Iceberg Conversation is to identify the systemic reasons for the underperformance.

When you sit down with an underperforming colleague, bring a mindset that your role is to help this person succeed. Bring your curiosity to this conversation to determine if you and the underperformer understand what's causing the problem.

Executive coaches use questions to illuminate blind spots, reframe thinking and re-energize a person's belief that the task before them can be accomplished. Questions are less likely to put the person on the defensive, and questions help you avoid making incorrect assumptions about a person and a particular behavior. Questions help both of you discover what's going on beneath the surface so you can develop a plan to address unproductive behavior.

The nature of your conversation depends on your conclusion about whether or not the underperformer is coachable.

Follow this process with peers and even your boss. If you find that the offending behavior in your peers or your boss does not change, you've got a different decision to make: Do I continue to tolerate this behavior, or do I leave the company?

You'll recognize the signs of a person willing to be coached, including:

- Honesty about the situation, including their behavior
- Remorse for how their behavior has hindered themselves, their colleagues and the organization
- Desire to learn and improve
- Willingness to do the work that will result in improvement

If you sense a person on your team is not coachable—and some people are not—your conversation can be brief and you can skip the questions: "I sense from observing your performance and behaviors these past several days/weeks that we may not be a great fit for you. Here's why. [Cite two or three recent facts (not opinions) as evidence supporting your statement.] I want us to develop a plan and timetable for moving you out of the company and onto a path that will be a better fit for you."

For underperformers you believe to be coachable, the conversation is different.

There's a science and an art to these conversations, and while the two components—science and art—require different skills they do not occur as separate free-standing entities during the conversation. They blend together. I've separated the two components to emphasize the distinct natures of each, and to emphasize the necessity of driving to conclusions and agreements around the "science," or framework, while it's your skill as a coach and your dexterity with the "art" of this conversation that determines whether the outcome is a good one for both you and the underperformer.

Here's the "science," or framework:

#### **Diagnose the problem**

- Drill down to ensure the systemic problem is addressed

#### **Examine options and agree on the best solution**

- Coach the underperformer into developing this plan: it's essential the plan is theirs—not yours—so they'll own it

#### **Revisit (or establish) performance expectations**

- Include a timeframe for getting performance back on track, checkpoints for coaching to increase the likelihood of success, and the impact of meeting expectations as well as the impact of falling short; memorialize the agreement



**Celebrate or separate**

- Agree that when the expectations are met, we'll celebrate; agree that if they're not, the underperformer will be separated from their position (either a transfer to a different role that suits their skills, or termination from the company)

Here's the "art" part of this conversation, the intangibles that make the difference between a productive conversation and a demoralizing castigation:

**Bring your best by being prepared.**

- Envision your ideal outcome and prepare questions that can help you achieve your objective
- Asking the right question is essential because general questions (*How's it going?*) yield general responses (*Fine.*)

**Be an advocate for their success.**

- They must trust your intentions because it's the only way the truth emerges
- Choose neutral words (avoid leading questions and emotional words) and be mindful of your tone

**Curiosity counts**

- Observe what's said, what's not said and body language
- Be genuinely curious: Turn potential statements into questions

**Be patient + Dig deep**

- Beware the canned answer: The person may be telling you what they think you want to hear
- Ask yourself: What might I be missing? Where do I lack clarity?
- Listen for opportunities to reframe a question or response
- Encourage them to work for *their* answer, *their* solution

Open-ended questions (questions requiring more than "yes" or "no" answers) invite the other person to share their story with you. These questions start with "How" and "What" and "If."

To help determine your next course of action, ask the person who is underperforming to answer questions such as these:

- "How would you describe the situation?"
- "What's at the root of your challenge?" "Is there anything unusual that's happening?"
- "Here's what I'm seeing. What am I missing?"
- "How would you characterize what I'm seeing with our company's core values?"
- "Are the expectations about the desired outcome clear?"
- "What does top performance look like?"
- "Have you done your best?"
- "What's the impact of your performance on the rest of the organization?"
- "If you could do it again, what would you do differently?"
- "What's your plan for getting your performance back on track?"

- “What’s the first step you plan to take?”
- “If you were me, what action would you take?”
- “What can I do to help you achieve the expected result?”

This process helps you assess the gap between their reality and yours. Determine the extent to which the underperformer is able and willing to improve.

Your assessment will help you answer the hardest question of all: How much more time will you invest in them to get their performance back on track?

If you believe the underperformer can be rejuvenated, then conclude your conversation by agreeing on next steps, memorializing the commitments that have been made by you (regarding further coaching milestones) and the underperformer (regarding their deadline for improving their performance).

Performance is a choice. And not every underperformer can be rejuvenated. Those who want to be treated differently must start acting differently. The employee who is unable or unwilling to perform must be prepared to accept the consequences of that decision.

If the underperformer is unable to improve, if moving them to a position that better suits their capabilities is not feasible . . . or if they choose for some reason not to address their performance, then termination is the last resort. If underperformers require termination, do it professionally and allow them their dignity.

Once that happens, chances are your colleagues will ask, *“What took you so long?”*

“In the short run,” another executive told me, “you might think it’s the right thing to do by being nice to people [by not confronting the underperformance]. But in the long run, you’re absolutely not taking care of your teammates and your obligations by letting substandard behavior continue. The key to changing any culture is changing behavior. If you don’t change behavior, you will not change your culture.”

You can believe in the other person more than they believe in themselves, but you cannot want success for the person you’re coaching more than they want it for themselves.

You cannot rejuvenate a person who is not capable of doing the work, who is not fulfilled by the work they do, or who is unwilling to change.

Your conversation can help them make a choice: to develop a plan for improving their performance, or to come to the realization they need a new plan for moving forward outside your organization. Whatever the decision, the outcome of this conversation can be considered satisfactory for each person.

I once fired the leader of one of our firm’s practice areas after setting a six-month timeframe for his turnaround. I didn’t think his performance would change materially over six months but

it was important to me that, because of his past contributions, he be given every opportunity to succeed. After six months, the expectations were not met. The parting was difficult but amicable. About a year later, the person I fired called to thank me. He'd left consulting, traded his laptop for a camera and was travelling the country photographing some of America's most beautiful sights and producing books, calendars and high-quality posters. He loved what he was doing and it showed in his award-winning photography.

Though I was unable to rejuvenate his performance in my firm, I achieved something nobler: I presented him with the opportunity to excel at something different that brought joy to his life.

The next time you experience an underperforming employee, think first about your role in the situation. And then use these guidelines. You may find that both you and the underperformer are rejuvenated.

# A Final Word about Accountability

Accountability is one of the most important factors in determining the success of an individual, a team and an entire organization. It's also one of the most universally misunderstood and misapplied concepts in business, making it one of the biggest challenges leaders face.

My decade of research surveying more 8,000 CEOs and key executives worldwide confirms that “lack of accountability” is the single greatest barrier to achieving consistently high levels of organizational performance.

Now you have the insight to think about and practice accountability like most successful leaders. And there's lots more guidance and best practices in my book [\*Accountability: The Key to Driving a High-Performance Culture\*](#).

By reading this book, you've learned that savvy leaders approach accountability with the mindset that it's not punishment—it's a choice. It's a choice for you and those around you.

## **You've also equipped yourself with:**

- The 5 questions every employee wants answered—answers that drive individual performance
- 12 questions you must ask yourself before a conversation with an underperformer
- Guidelines for a coaching conversation to produce a rewarding outcome for you and the underperformer

Accountability is a mindset. It's not a technique—it's a way of being all the time.

Use these concepts and tools to help you drive accountability—in yourself, your teams and your organization—to achieve more of the high performance you want.

Thank you for reading this eBook. I wish you great success on your accountability journey.

Greg Bustin

[www.bustin.com](http://www.bustin.com)

# Books by Greg Bustin

Learn the secrets of using accountability as a tool to drive high performance from the world's most admired companies. This collection of resources provides to leaders the essential leadership skills and practices for improving individual and organizational results.

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