

There's No Winner in the Blame Game

Henry Ford once said, "Don't find blame. Find solutions." Many leaders and their staff get stuck in the blame game. Some take delight in pointing fingers, insulting others, and squabbling over blame. Many direct reports consistently fight each other and run to higher ups to report on each other – sometimes with inaccurate information and without previously discussing with their peers. Criticism and judgment about team members, underperforming employees, or problematic bosses can be cathartic, but **blaming doesn't fix anything.**

Many leaders spend time seeking the truth, coaching, counseling, focusing on solving problems and attempting to make peace only to find that some work attitudes and habits are hard to change. The following are some actions a leader can do to stop an addiction to blame and encourage problem solving and prevention:

- **When things go wrong you must find the cause.**
First, determine what went wrong; second, find out why and how it went wrong; and fourth, identify who went wrong. Putting the what, why, and how before "the who" takes the onus off individuals and puts it squarely where it belongs---on the problem.
- **Review your staff's strengths, weaknesses, and problem-solving skills.**
Do the people involved in the problem have enough education and training? Do communication problems exist? Are the right people in the right jobs? Are the team members cooperating? Does trust exist? If no, what can be done to build cooperation and trust? What do people directly involved have to say about how to prevent this problem from happening again? Is management willing to make adjustments?
- **Make it safe to fail.**
The root of the blame game is failure. Managers can do well by making certain that their subordinates understand that it is okay to occasionally fail, as long as they are working in the parameters of the job and doing what they think is best for the team.
- **Don't blame...Explain. Communications is essential to avoiding the blame game.**
Before you find solutions to a failure, you need to articulate the problem. By itemizing the steps, you can define two things: what went wrong as well as what went right. Communicate personal responsibility and accountability. Accountability stands a better chance of succeeding when employees understand their contributions to the success of the organization rather than from the perspective of what may seem to be detailed or boring tasks. State clear expectations and consequences of actions. Performance expectations must be clear and consequences understood. If your expectations are confusing the important details can fall through the cracks.

There are occasions when blame must be apportioned and discipline enacted, however, successful organizations know how to handle the blame game. They deal with mistakes by finding solutions and teaching their employees to anticipate problems, deal with them, and move forward.