

## Moving to Accountable Action

Last time we presented a model and some theoretical background for the victim versus accountable mindset. Our hope is that you gained some insights on how we move from the victim mindset to the accountable frame of mind and how that movement can enhance business effectiveness

Chris Argyris, professor emeritus of Harvard, first voiced the need for two simple components for effective change in organizations: Having a good theory, then taking action. I, and many others, have tested his premise many times and always found it to be true: the best and most effective way to move forward is to

- have a qualified idea set or method that you think will work
- take action
- observe behaviors
- track and measure results
- refine your actions based on the evidence

We established the model in our last article for moving effectively from being a victim to becoming accountable. Now we need to examine how to make that model both actionable and effective.

**A MAPT** is the model we have found invaluable in moving from the victim space to the accountable space. You create “a map” and then test the map to see if it takes you where you want to go. **A MAPT** stands for

- **Assess**
- **Mindset** or Perspective
- **Action** or Decision
- **Practice**
- **Test**

Following this approach, first with myself, and then with coaching clients, has proved consistently and predictably to produce quality results. While using this approach does not guarantee permanent transformation, it does help to break the gravitational pull of victimization and help us stay focused on remaining accountable. Being accountable most often takes two forms:

- being aware, ahead of time, what you need to do and then doing it or,
- taking action, observing the outcome and revising our behavior as needed

Let's look at the accountable model in more detail.

"I'm powerless and there's nothing I can do about it." The biggest challenge with the victim mindset is that we don't usually know we have it. *It is out of sight.*

For example:

- We think that the other person ran into us with their car and it isn't fair
- We think that someone else got a bigger raise and it isn't fair
- We think that my staff is not productive because they are lazy

These are some of the typical stories that victims tell themselves.

In the victim mindset we rarely notice that we were distracted before the argument, or that we really did not do very good work on the project, or that we did not set clear expectations with our staff. We were probably not aware of how our state of mind or the conclusions we drew got in the way of our making better and more effective decisions.

The first step in moving from being a victim to becoming accountable is in working to gain insight or perspective. This may take the form of checking my perspective or point of view and assessing its accuracy or validity. I need to ask myself: *What do I assume to be true about a particular situation?* and recognize that this mindset will probably affect the outcome. It's helpful to bear in mind this statement about the impact of assumptions when something is not working well. For example: I've had conflict with someone or there is a disappointing outcome. I may experience pain or frustration; having an accountable mindset will motivate me to do something differently. To gain the needed insight I need to check my assumptions and see how they affect my behavior. This exercise allows us to see and understand how the victim mindset contributes to the unwanted outcome.

The chart on page 3 is useful in seeing the path from being a victim to becoming accountable. We have charted the pathway we have found most useful in moving from victim to accountable. The picture is drawn intentionally in a counter clockwise direction. Why? Because to *change the path from victim to accountable requires a new way of thinking.* The chart says: When we are in the victim mindset (and all of us are, at times) we must stop, and intentionally and by design, think and act in a new and more productive fashion.

→ The *focus* emanates from the individual who asks, "What did I do that is causing me to be stuck or having difficulties?"

→ The *process* requires that I take full responsibility for my discomfort, articulate my "contribution," and then ask, "What do I need to do to get out of the middle of

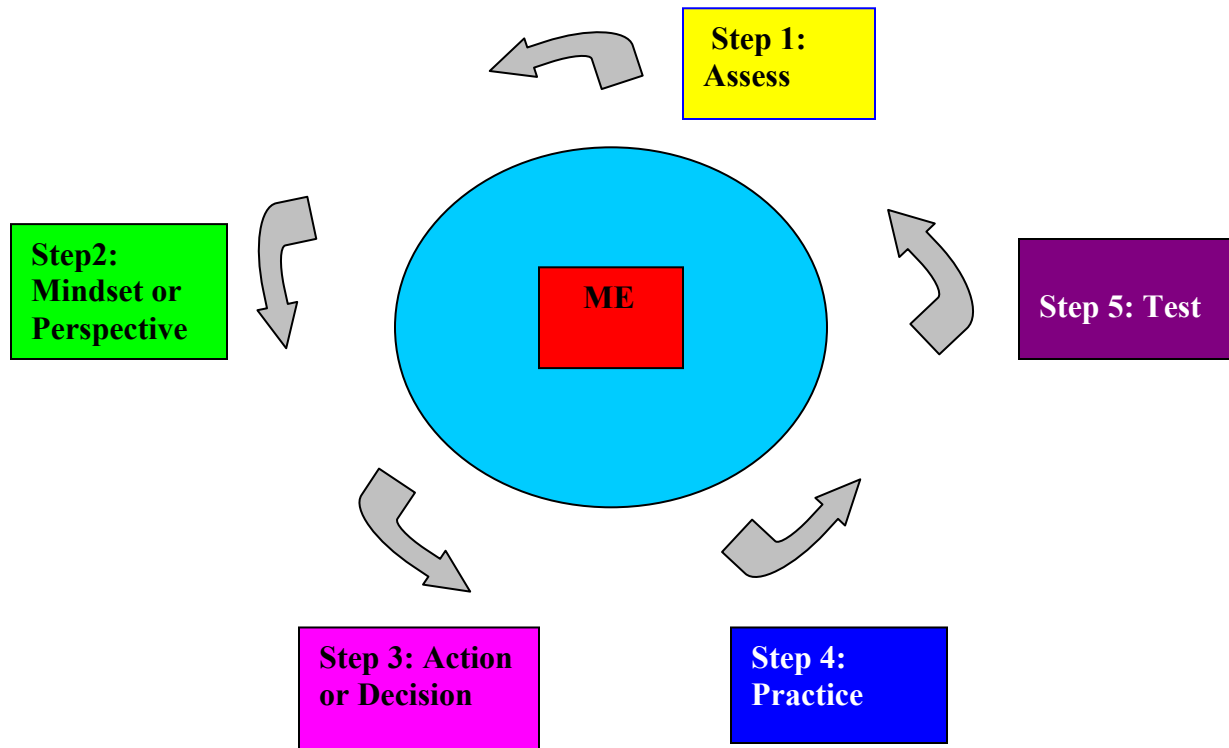
the circle?" Accountability is not affixing blame; accountability means evolving to more effective behaviors.

→ The new thinking, "What did I do?" is the first step in my recognizing my part in the problem. This step essentially stops the blame game. We acknowledge there is a problem and we are at least a part of it.

→ The *transition*, suggests that I use my creativity to begin thinking differently.

→ The new action takes me off the "hamster wheel" and into new behaviors which may yield different outcomes

## The Process of Change



## Step 1 **Assess** → Gain Clarity about the Issue, Define the Problem

What's the problem? For example: "Mary and I don't work well anymore. She is a pain to work with. Boy, I wish Frank (who used to have the job) was still here."

🌱 This might be my first level assessment in the victim mindset.

When I examine the consequences I discover: It's costing us time at work, it makes others uncomfortable. It seems that she is more focused on people issues now and I am more focused on the financials and am uncomfortable with our relationship. I notice I am tense and frustrated, and often focus on all the things that she is doing that keep us from moving ahead.

## Step 2 → **Mindset or Perspective**

In step two, we need to take a fresh look at our current situation. We need to express the perceptions that exist and evaluate their impacts. In particular, we need to identify the assumptions we have made and the conclusions we have drawn. Most importantly we need to ask, "What have I done to contribute to this difficulty, impasse, misunderstanding or problem?"

*Breaking out of the mindset at this stage is the key to moving from being a victim to becoming accountable. If we do not take this step we will not move ahead. My colleague, Nick Ray, describes the prerequisite for gaining a foothold in this stage as having an active interest in changing and an inner acknowledgment that courage is required to move out of the old way of thinking.*

This is the place where we often need the help of others to "get out of the box" we have created. Usually, we stay stuck as victim because we

- ▶ want to be right,
- ▶ because we think we are right
- ▶ because it is easier and more comfortable to be the victim or
- ▶ because we are unaware of being in the victim mindset
- ▶ do not see other options

Remaining the victim allows me to maintain the status quo. *This is the most important place in the cycle. It requires concerted effort to reverse the energy*

*flow, facilitating movement to an accountability mode and higher level functioning.*

*The most powerful questions to ask now are:*

- What's important?
- What's my purpose?
- What's my bottom line?

We need to surface and articulate our assumptions about what we believe to be true, and then test them for validity and accuracy. Are my assumptions really true- or are they simply one way of looking at the situation? The first step in moving towards new action is gaining a change in perspective. Some useful tools include:

- **Practice self observation and increased awareness-** Using the concepts from the previous article you can make the conscious decision to notice when you are acting like a victim or find yourself on the hamster wheel. *To create impact, ask yourself, "What does an accountable perspective look like?"* For example, I may have noticed that I don't consistently value Mary's contributions.
- **Get feedback from others in your environment-** Let those you trust know that you are working to improve yourself and ask them for feedback on your progress. For example, you might learn that they've observed that you've started taking Mary for granted.
- **Get feedback from a coach-** Choose to work with an objective professional who can assist you in changing your perspective so that you function better. In working with a coach you might discover your real attitude about Mary. This insight might lead you to change your behavior towards her and the entire business situation.
- **Use additional tools for gaining perspective or insight** including meditation, therapy, asking others for help, and self help literature.

**Step 3 → Action or Decision-** Make a decision to do something different and commit to taking action. Set goals and determine measures.

David Allen, author of Getting Things Done takes us directly into the field of action. Allen suggests that to be efficient and productive, taking action, we need to attain a "mind like water." By taking the first two steps, which are assessing the situation and defining the problem we can begin to see our

situation more clearly and to explore new actions that lead to more positive outcomes.

We have found that the move to accountability is supported by being simple and making choices. One to two (1-2) important new actions are all that most people, even our victim overachievers from the first article, can manage successfully. Select one to two new actions, then create goals and determine how to measure success. To make certain you are making informed choices review your answers to the key questions from step 2:

- ▶ What's important?
- ▶ What's my purpose?
- ▶ What's my bottom line?

To cultivate accountability, we need something or someone to whom we will be accountable: public accountability is empowering. Good thoughts are a precursor to success but not usually sufficient to help us move ahead successfully. Creating a way to track accountability creates an actionable plan that documents what we are doing in the real world. The map requires:

- ▶ Making informed choices about what to work on
- ▶ Creating measurable goals
- ▶ Implementing a system for ensuring accountability

In moving from victim to accountable we are following the path of:

***Victim* → Apply Attention and Focus → Accountable**

***Victim* → Explore Possibilities → Accountable**

***Victim* → Make Plans for Change and then Practice → Accountable**

**Step 4** → **Practice** - In this stage we try on new ways of functioning and evaluate their effectiveness. We can consider practice as a trial and error process where we actively look for new ways to deal with our own mindset.

Practice is the first real step into the new world and it is where we will require the most active support. We will succeed and we will fail. Just like any beta test for a product or new way of delivering service this requires a trial and error process. Talent is helpful but practice is essential.

### **Step 5- Test → Measure Actual Results, Revise**

The single most important discipline in getting things done is review, according to productivity consultant Marc Orchant. This is the phase where we discover if we are actually making a difference, acting accountably and diminishing our victimization. This is business in action.

### **Conclusion**

We measure our results. We see if we are achieving our goals or not. We make adjustments or refinements to our actions. We act like accountable adults. It is not easy or comfortable but it does permit us to take right action and most report the experience as ultimately more satisfying.

In The Power of Personal Accountability Mark Samuel aptly describes the stance of a victim as, “Why Me?” A victim focuses his time on hiding and denying, a person of accountability focuses their time and attention on owning, forgiving and taking action. How much longer do you have to choose? Someone will leave you or the marketplace will eat you alive if you don’t change.

For myself, I have discovered that choosing the path of accountability brings greater internal satisfaction and puts me in a place of power. Not control or controlling others from not doing, but the power to create, to impact and craft the world in the way that I want it. For me and many of my clients that seems to be the main attraction and lure. As a leader it is also the carrot to be offered to many followers who want to contribute, who want to have impact and who want to make a difference. If you act accountably, you gain power.

I am the biggest barrier I have found to seeing other people and situations accurately. Often, I simply deceive myself about what’s true because I don’t know or don’t see. On the path to becoming accountable, it is necessary to employ some new tools, do hard work, act with courage and enlist the help of others to help you see that to which you are blind. Are you ready?

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**Next Month: The Victim Accountability Scorecard: Are You Making Progress?**