

Correction—You’re Likely Doing It Wrong (If You’re Doing It at All)



Even when we have done our own part well, things still don’t always “go right” in the workplace. People make [mistakes](#): they do less than their best, they blame, they create conflict, they fail to perform. The list goes on.

When we have done our own part well and things have still gone wrong, we must correct inappropriate or misguided behavior. The following four concepts guide us in navigating correction in a new (and less intimidating) light.

1. Corrective action follows directly from the concept of personal accountability.

Arbinger’s work indicates that organizations thrive when leaders develop *self-accountable* employees. Self-accountability simply means that people hold themselves accountable for their impact, rather than being held accountable by others (usually a manager).

Correction is required only when people are not holding themselves accountable for their performance or conduct. In those cases, we are simply supplying the accountability they are failing to supply. That’s all correction is.

2. Holding people accountable, when

necessary, is part of seeing them as people.

When self-accountability is not present, to hold people accountable for their performance is to see and treat them as people—people who have the capacity to be responsible, to contribute, to make decisions, to achieve results.

To indulge them by failing to require high standards of performance and conduct is to see them as objects—usually vehicles that we want to admire us and/or like us. (If we think about it, we will discover that when we fail to hold people accountable, we are often thinking of ourselves—not of the other person and not of the results we are to achieve together.)

3. Holding people accountable is enlivening, not punishing.

When we are inward, our correction of others tends to be punishing: judgmental, angry, spiteful, sarcastic, even abusive. This is not accountability.

Accountability is simply holding people to the high standards of performance and conduct which are expected of them and which they already understand. We do this in a clear, but helpful and straightforward, way, and most often with a spirit of encouragement.

4. Our ability to hold others accountable depends on our effectiveness in holding ourselves

accountable.

Correction of others is never effective (and never just) if we are not trying our best. That is why, when it is time to correct someone, our first step is to ask six questions about ourselves:

1. Am I delivering results myself?
2. Do I have an outward mindset?
3. Have I built strong, healthy relationships with my coworkers?
4. Have I built strong, healthy relationships with my team members?
5. Do I know my team members and their needs, and am I actively learning from them?
6. Have I taught my team members what they need to know and provided them with the tools they need to succeed?

We need not be perfect in our leadership in order to correct others, but our correction of them must be based on expectations that are reasonable in light of our own leadership performance and our own efforts to improve. If I see gaps in my own performance, but also recognize an immediate need to help my direct report correct their performance, then I can acknowledge my own weaknesses and need for improvement during my conversation with this employee.