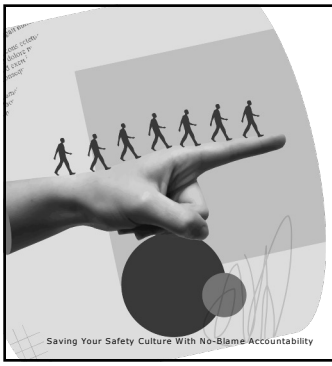


Saving Your Safety Culture With No-Blame Accountability

1



Danny Smith, SMP, CIT
Senior Safety Consultant
SafeStart

2

Tripping Over the Toolbox

An employee is rushing to finish a task at the end of the day because there is a strict no-overtime rule.

Focused on getting to the timeclock to punch out, he trips over another worker's toolbox that was left in the walkway and falls.

Whose fault is this?

- Management
- The employee who tripped
- The owner of the toolbox
- Other?



3

We Know Blame Is Toxic

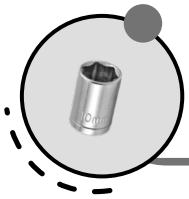
- HOP tells us "blame fixes nothing"
- Safety culture demands a "no-blame mindset"
- But we need to acknowledge three realities:
  - Recognizing blame as unproductive isn't enough to eliminate it
  - When we say "no blame" we don't mean "never blame"
  - It is possible to talk about human factors and even mistakes in safety without blame!



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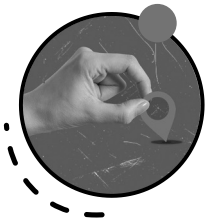
Where are we with blame?



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5

Question



Think of a time you blamed someone for something that went wrong.

Why do we find it easy to blame others?

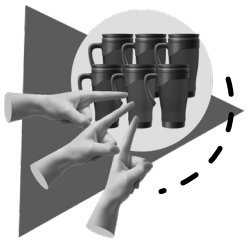
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6

Question

Think of a time when you were blamed for an incident.

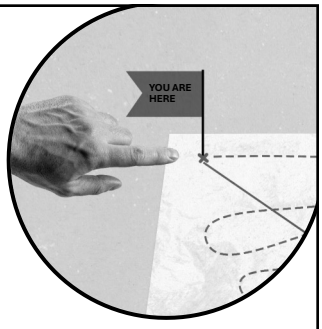
What did you experience and how did it affect your work?



7

A Common Starting Point

- We've all blamed someone
- We've all been blamed



8

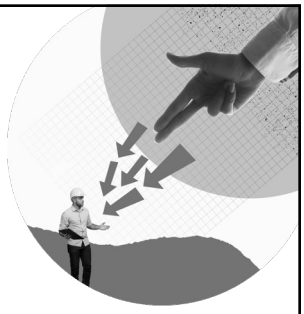
Symptoms of a Blame Culture



9

Disciplinary Measures

- A blamed individual is punished to discourage the actions believed to cause the incident.
- Punishment is also used as a warning sign for others: don't make mistakes or this will happen to you, too.
- "Blame, Shame, Retrain" mentality is counterproductive!



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Social Consequences

- Blame shows up as ridicule from all levels of an organization, framing an incident as an extension of an individual's personal shortcomings.
- How many times have you been in a situation where a person involved in an incident was called "stupid" or "incompetent"?



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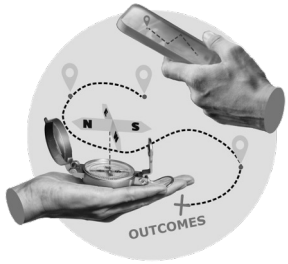
Passive Aggression

- A blamed individual being given undesirable schedules, having their communications ignored or being micromanaged.
- Passive aggression can be subtle, like reducing a part-time employee's hours, or it can be overt, like excluding an individual from team activities.



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Picture a map…

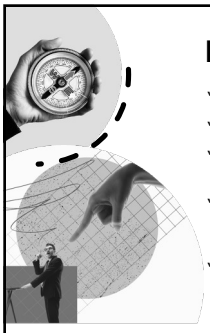
13

The Cardinal Directions of Blame

Identifying the different directions of blame and where they lead us.



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Blaming the System

"They never fix anything around here."

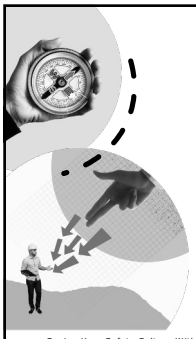
"There's no way to make them happy."

"We can't hit our production goals with this crappy equipment."

"How do they expect me to turn out quality parts with a machine that hasn't been PM'd in six months?"

"The only time we hear about safety is after something bad happened."

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Blaming Someone Else

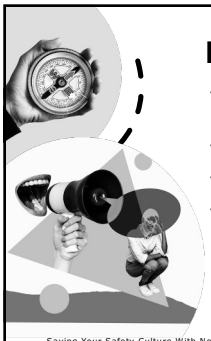
"What were you thinking?"

"You might be the only person in the world that could do something that dumb."

"If third shift would actually do a little work around here things might be different."

"If maintenance would fix some of these hydraulic leaks I wouldn't have hurt my back."

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Blaming Yourself

"How could I have done something so stupid?"

"What was I thinking?"

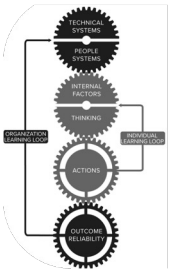
"I can't believe I just did that."

"I should have been paying better attention."

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Human Factors Framework

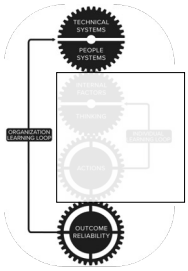
- In business we want **reliable outcomes** in safety, quality, productivity or other areas.
- There are two learning loops we examine when looking to improve these outcomes:
  - **Organization learning loop**
  - **Individual learning loop**



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Organization Learning Loop

- The **organization learning loop** includes:
  - **Technical systems** like equipment, maintenance, processes and even our safety management systems.
  - **People systems** including team dynamics, supervisory skill and overall culture.
- These systems are set up and managed with the goal of a **reliable outcome**. But there is another side of this equation.

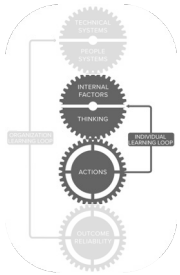


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Individual Learning Loop

- The **individual learning loop** connects the **systems** to the **outcomes** through the people that do the work. It includes:
  - **Internal factors**: distraction, fatigue, being in a hurry, feeling sick, overconfidence and many other human factors.
  - **Thinking**: conscious decision making and subconscious habitual responses, influenced by **internal factors**.
  - **Actions**: the result of our **thinking** informed by our **internal factors**.

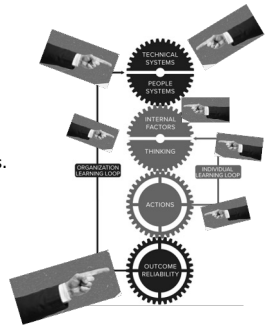


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Blame in the Framework

- There's no doubt **blame** can have an impact on our desired reliable outcomes.
- What specific areas of this framework could be influenced by **blame**?



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Blame's Effects

"Pointing fingers does not make things better, it makes you bitter."

- Candace Carnahan

Safety Motivational Speaker, Empowerment Advocate
Workplace Injury Survivor

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Fear of Blame and Its' Consequences

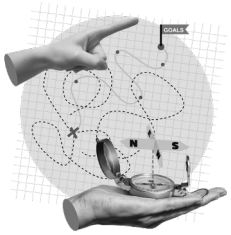
- Reluctance to use stop work authority
- Reduced incident reporting
- Amplified human factors
- Eroded communication
- Limited transparency



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Blame and Accountability

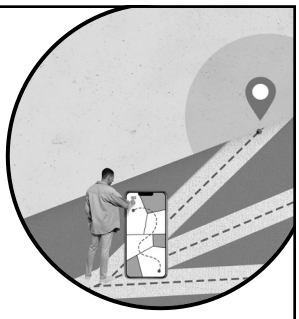
Untangling blame from accountability.



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Reorient Towards Accountability

Accountability considers:
- Where we've been
- Where we are
- Where we're going



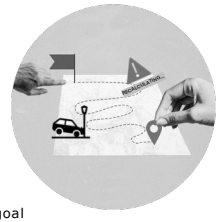
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What is Accountability?

Accountability is a commitment to our established goals and outcomes.

- It starts with expectation
  - What needs doing, how and by whom
- It continues through acknowledgement
  - Incidents happen, they may shift our expectations
- It is maintained though reorientation
  - Despite changes we stay focused on our goal



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The Blame Tactic

Blame is a tactic that points us away from learning opportunities and from achieving our desired outcomes.

- Blame starts with fixation
  - What went wrong, how it went wrong and who did it
- Blame builds with ignorance
  - Blame ignores holistic variables like systems, actions and human factors
- Blame enforces through punishment
  - Punishing "who did it" with the intention of discouraging further mistakes



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The Fork in the Road

- An incident presents us with the option of shifting to the direction of blame or sticking to the accountability path.
- The easiest way to untangle blame from accountability is to deconstruct our reaction to an incident, then see how we can achieve our desired outcome while learning from the situation – without blame.



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Tripping Over the Toolbox, Revisited

- An employee is rushing to finish a task at the end of the day because there is a strict no-overtime rule.
- Focused on getting to the timeclock to punch out, he trips over another worker's toolbox that was left in the walkway and falls.



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Tripping Over the Toolbox, Revisited

Desired outcomes after the trip:

- Taking care of the injured employee
- Acknowledging an incident occurred
- Preventing a repeat incident
- Ensuring incidents have consequences



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Where Does Blame Get Us?



The Path of Blame
- Blaming the system
- Blaming someone else
- Blaming ourselves

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How Do We Achieve These Outcomes Without Blame?



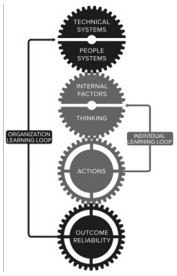
The Path of Accountability
- Seeing the big picture
- Reorienting
- Staying focused on our goal

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People Are Not Hazards

By removing blame, we free ourselves to improve the entire system rather than isolating a single target for punishment.





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Committing to Accountability

Understanding accountability as a promise.

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Organizational Requirements

To commit to accountability, your organization's culture needs to have a foundation of:

- Psychological safety
- Mutual respect and trust
- Continuous improvement



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Commitment Questions

Who needs to commit?

- Organization
- Leaders
- Safety professionals
- Workers

Accountability cannot reside solely on the shop floor!

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Commitment Questions

What are we committing to?

- Outcomes
- Safety
- Communication
- Transparency

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"No Blame" Isn't "No Consequence"

Consequences are not the number one priority and may not be disciplinary.

Ask yourself, "If blame and discipline were not options, what else would you do?"

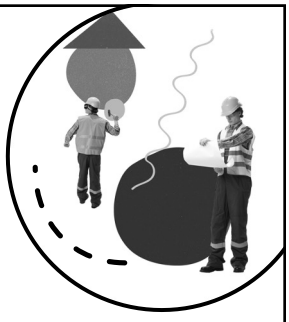


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Contingencies

An accountability map:

- Keeps us focused on accountability
- Shows us the risk of blame returning to our culture
- Is perfect for learning teams
- Provides transparent, consistent, timely communication



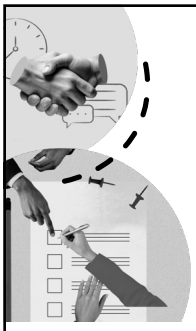
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Making an Accountability Map

Commitment		Persons/ Departments	
Action Proposed	**ETA**	**Status**	**Last Updated**

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Being Realistic

An accountability map:

- **Demonstrates** that concerns were communicated, received and shared
- **Identifies** areas responsible for the issue
- **Displays** that initiative was taken and gives a reason for a stall
- **Contextualizes** all issues and things that are going right

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Other Navigation Tools

- Online portal
- Digital displays
- Updates during regular meetings
- Biweekly emails



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Review

Putting it all together.



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Directions, Commitment, and Maps

Blame

Points in three counterproductive directions:

- System
- Others
- Self

Accountability

A collective commitment to:

- Communication
- Transparency
- Safety
- Outcomes

Maps

Maintain blame-free accountability by measuring:

- Commitment
- People
- Action
- Timing & Status

45

Tripping Over the Toolbox, One Last Time

Who's at fault? Who's accountable?

- The management
- The person who tripped
- The owner of the toolbox
- Other



46

QUESTIONS?



THANK YOU

Scan this QR code to access no-blame accountability resources.

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