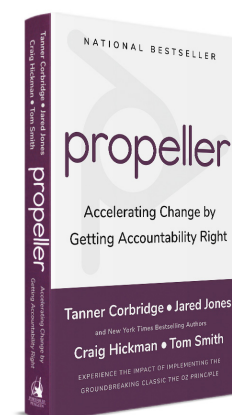


# Propeller

Accelerating Change by Getting Accountability Right

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## THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

*The Oz Principle* has sold more than a million copies since it debuted in 1994, establishing it as the go-to reference on workplace accountability throughout the world. By embracing its practical and invaluable advice, tens of thousands of companies have improved their organizational accountability—the key to achieving and sustaining exceptional results.

Now, the team at Partners In Leadership is applying 30 years of proven success to a whole new concept: *Propeller*. This book presents a modern take on accountability while remaining faithful to the elegantly simple premise: When people take personal ownership of their organization's priorities and accept responsibility for their own performance, they become more engaged and perform at a higher level.

With all new examples and stories, *Propeller* builds on the *The Oz Principle's* legacy to inspire the next generation of readers to tap the incredible power of personal, team, and organizational accountability.

## IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- To use accountability as a powerful, positive motivator for achieving great results.
- What it takes to operate Above the Line.
- Key principles to help you and your people See It, Own It, Solve It, and Do It.
- To practice effective Above the Line leadership.

## The Power of Getting Accountability Right

In L. Frank Baum's classic story *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy and her companions learn that no matter how difficult your circumstances, the power to address your challenges and achieve the results you desire lies inside you, not in some external force or in the hands of some guru pulling levers behind a velvet curtain.

From this, Partners in Leadership created the Oz Principle: "Only when you assume full accountability for your thoughts, feelings, actions, and results can you direct your own destiny; otherwise someone or something else will." For the past 25 years, organizations around the world have implemented this principle as a Propeller to accelerate change by getting accountability right, C-suite to front line.

*Propeller* captures in one word what the Oz Principle and the Steps to Accountability create: accelerated movement in a needed direction. No matter how daunting the obstacles you face, you can deepen your resolve to take accountability for your results—past, present, and future.

Such resolve moves leaders, teams, and organizations to choose optimism when pessimism is justified, to accept responsibility when blaming others is easily explained, and to move forward and win when giving up is understandable.

Ask any CEO or senior leader, and most will readily acknowledge the mistakes they've made. The most influential leaders, however, demonstrate a unique ability to make egoless adjustments to their previous decisions. They take total ownership for current circumstances and inspire a sense of optimism within the teams they lead. These are the leaders who get accountability right. And when they do, everyone who works with them wins.

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## Accountability for Key Results: Applying the Oz Principle, C-Suite to Front Line

Consider what images spring to mind when you hear the word "accountability." Most likely you picture some sort of punishment for a mistake, perhaps someone in authority holding your feet to the fire or hammering you for wrongdoing.

But accountability is not an accounting for misdeeds or a reckoning for one's missteps; it's a powerful motivator for getting results.

Accountability is a personal choice to rise above one's circumstances and demonstrate the ownership necessary for achieving desired results; to See It, Own It, Solve It, and Do It.

This definition suggests that accountability begins with a decision to do something to create a better outcome. It urges the person taking accountability to avoid the temptation of falling victim to difficult circumstances and embrace the opportunity of working toward a better end result.

No one gives accountability to you; you must take it. When you take it, you put yourself in charge of the outcomes you want and need to deliver.

### Accountability Principles

Three basic principles will help you harness the power of accountability:

**Understand the steps to accountability that promote ownership and propel change.** A line separates the unproductive, time-wasting, results-impeding blame game from the Steps to Accountability that must be taken in order to deliver results. Below the Line, people focus on what they can't control, they play the victim, ignore and deny the problem, point their finger at others, cover their tails in order to get themselves off the hook, claim that it's not their job, act confused while expecting someone else to tell them what to do, or just wait to see if the issue or problem will magically resolve itself.

Above the Line, people focus on what they can control, and they assume accountability for resolving issues or problems by taking four sure steps toward getting the right result: They See It, Own It, Solve It, and Do It. People who languish Below the Line prepare stories that explain why past efforts went awry; people who reside Above the Line empower themselves to strive for better results.

**Apply the model to yourself to reduce time spent below the line.** There's not one of us who is immune to giving in to the temptation to take ourselves off the hook with one excuse or another: "I didn't have enough time." "That's not my job." "The schedule is too tight." "We need more resources."

It's not wrong to go Below the Line. It's human nature. We all let the gravitational force that accompanies victim thinking pull us Below the Line into the realm of excuse-making when things go wrong or challenges confront us.

But all of us can acknowledge that it's totally ineffective

## The Above the Line and Below the Line language is sticky because of its simplicity and intuitiveness.

to stay there, continually rationalizing and explaining why we're stuck and can't move forward. When we find ourselves Below the Line, the best thing we can do is acknowledge where we are and choose to move Above the Line.

**Adopt the common language of accountability to accelerate movement.** The Above the Line and Below the Line language is sticky because of its simplicity and intuitiveness. When companies learn to use the Steps to Accountability model, they use the model's language to talk about their work. Above the Line, the Line, and Below the Line become an integral part of their daily discussions as they seek to solve problems and move forward. Adopting common performance management language gets everybody on the same page.

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### Key Results: Defining and Achieving What Matters Most

Creating accountability begins with clearly defining results. Clearly defined and well-understood results are those select, few deliverables that every individual in the organization is aligned around and committed to achieve, no matter his or her role, function, department, or geographical location.

These select, few deliverables are Key Results. Ideally, Key Results should be limited to three to five meaningful, measurable, and memorable outcomes.

#### Key Results Principles

A culture wherein you get accountability right is created and sustained by applying four fundamental principles:

**Define key results to promote accountability and facilitate needed change.** As leaders clearly define a manageable number of meaningful, measurable, and memorable Key Results, individuals are actually empowered to take accountability to look at what else they can do to achieve them.

**Create joint accountability to improve the probability of achieving Key Results.** Since achieving Key Results almost always requires a concerted effort by more than one person, success depends on shared ownership and

joint accountability. When you get a workforce asking the question "What else can I do?" to achieve the result, especially during times of uncertainty, stress, challenge, or difficulty, magic can happen. That's the power of joint accountability. Joint accountability often requires that a company dismantle its silos and create cross-functional teams.

**Realize that working to achieve Key Results is the essence of working above the line.** When people get stuck Below the Line, they have given up on the results and are now working on the story they can tell to justify why they can't do it. Taking accountability always poses a certain amount of personal risk. "I'm just doing my job" creates a comfort zone, but that comfort zone often threatens your ability to get results. The comfort it provides is an illusion. Overcoming that illusion requires taking accountability for owning "my impact" on achieving the Key Results, which only happens Above the Line.

**Ring the bell of success as progress is made to keep people focused on their impact.** Leaders should "ring a bell" that signals achievements along the road to results. It can take many forms, be it an actual bell or something else that provides meaningful recognition. Without clear reminders of progress, people can get lost in the daily activity it takes to do their jobs and lose their focus on results. Recognizing positive performance wherever and whenever it shows up creates momentum and reinforces the importance of taking personal and joint accountability for what matters most.

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### See It: Mustering the Courage to Acknowledge Reality

Seeing It is the first and the hardest step Above the Line. Seeing It requires a level of curiosity, courage, and humility that allows you to hear what you may be uncomfortable hearing.

In order to fully See It, you must be hungry for perspectives you don't already have, you must be able to face reality, and you must be willing to acknowledge that you don't have all the answers. Without curiosity, courage, and humility, you will be severely limited in your ability to See It.

## See It Principles

These four See It principles will help you begin to change what needs changing:

### **Park your ego at the door to improve your vision.**

Egotism is a choice one makes to place themselves at the center of their world and focus almost exclusively on satisfying their own needs and welfare first. This choice keeps people from seeing the full picture.

If you want to increase workforce engagement, ensure everyone knows you hear their voices. Engaging workers requires that leaders set aside any preference for the outdated “command and control” or “the boss knows best” style of management.

### **Welcome difficult conversations to make them contagious.**

Candid and honest dialogue helps everyone to see the reality of a situation. Do “candid and honest” occasionally, and you will go broke gradually, then suddenly. Do it all the time, and you will prosper.

Kelli Valade’s promotion to president of Chili’s Grill & Bar in 2016 shows the benefits of having open feedback ingrained as a habit. Her new job put Kelli in charge of overseeing all aspects of domestic restaurant operations, marketing, franchising, and human resources for the brand, which operated roughly 1,600 restaurants at the time.

Immediately after assuming the top job, she knew that effectively leading the company’s far-flung network would depend on increasing the number of difficult conversations she and her people had. She formed what she called “Kelli’s Councils.” These councils, composed mostly of front-line staff and managers, became her operational eyes and ears.

As she formed these councils within every region of the organization, she began learning about tactical problems that were occurring within the restaurants’ day-to-day operations. This early warning system enabled her to streamline operations and increase revenue quickly, thereby demonstrating to the entire organization that “feedback is priceless,” a mantra Kelli recited to her people every day.

**Embrace the feedback you receive to accelerate your ability to change.** It takes patience, persistence, and courage to ask for and listen to the hard truths. Seeing It depends as much on your ears as on your eyes. As you come to understand that reality at your core, you will seek and provide feedback as if your life depends on it.

**Link what you see to Key Results to keep you on**

**the path to achieve them.** You may see a lot of problems you think your organization should solve, but unless a given problem prevents you from achieving the Key Results you’re seeking, you should not make it a top priority. You must both know and understand the Key Results, why they must be achieved, and whether or not specific problems need to be solved in order to achieve them.

## Own It: Assessing Agreement and Defining Involvement

Taking the Own It step goes way beyond a dictionary’s definition of ownership. Someone demonstrates ownership when they are able to connect present circumstances with both the past and the future.

All of us have made decisions, taken actions, and responded to information that has led us to our current circumstances. We need to own those realities. When we do own them, we find greater power to affect our futures.

### Own It Principles

The following model provides an easy-to-remember snapshot of the most common levels of ownership. The two key elements that determine each level of ownership are agreement and involvement.

**Understand the consequences of (–) negative ownership.** Negative Ownership = uninvolved and disagree. This (–) Negative Ownership posture, where people disagree with the direction and refuse to get involved in its implementation and achievement, undermines the delivery of Key Results at every turn. Issues and problems remain unseen and unaddressed as people purposefully withhold information needed to identify, correct, and resolve them.

Additionally, individuals at the (–) Negative Ownership level rarely remain quiet about their discontent. They often work to recruit allies to support their disgruntled positions, often becoming a cancer that infects the entire culture. When you add up their lack of agreement and their lack of involvement, you get (–) Negative Ownership that actually pulls you backward.

**Resist the deception of (0) Zero Ownership.** Zero Ownership = uninvolved and agree. A leader with (0) Zero Ownership has thoughts like these: “I agree something needs to be done, but it’s not my job to figure this out. It’s *their* problem. Let *them* figure it out.”

The problem here is, people really believe it's not their job to be involved. For this reason, (0) Zero Ownership can be very deceptive. On the surface it sounds like there is some ownership. People speak to the issue at hand with passion, fully acknowledging the severity of the situation, but then exempt themselves from actually participating in the process of solving it or engaging with the team to achieve it.

If left alone, (0) Zero Ownership can establish a precedent for inaction throughout the organization. For those at (0) Zero Ownership, the buck keeps passing without ever landing on anyone's desk.

Applying the Solve It step requires openness, authenticity, and humility on the part of the leader.

#### **Embrace the advantage of (+) Positive Ownership.**

Positive Ownership = involved and disagree. This involves those who disagree with the target but are entirely involved in achieving it. Their disagreement can manifest itself in countless ways. Some may disagree because the metric and target they've been asked to deliver don't seem reasonable. Others might disagree simply because they lack data or understanding or needed context.

What's the advantage of (+) Positive Ownership? It's simple: While people with (+) Positive Ownership openly communicate their disagreement, they are committed to focusing on what else they can do to get the needed result and taking the necessary actions to make it happen. In this case, their involvement speaks louder than their disagreement.

Positive Ownership propels you forward precisely because people at this level take positive steps, despite the fact that they disagree.

**Harvest the power of (++) Total Ownership.** Total Ownership = involved and agree. Here, people fully agree with and quickly become involved in delivering the needed direction, target, or outcome. Their agreement and buy-in are what separate them from the (+) Positive Level of Own-

ership. Because of their agreement they do not, even for a moment, vacillate between opinions. Once a decision is made, they move without hesitation and immediately invest themselves in delivering the targeted result.

They bring their best creative selves to their jobs, never giving up, always rejecting Below the Line thinking, and working tirelessly to succeed.

### **Solve It: Obtaining the Wisdom to Solve What You Own**

When it comes to the Solve It step, high achievers channel their creative thinking into answering this deceptively simple yet powerfully propelling question: "What else can I do?"

If achieving needed results begins to seem increasingly unattainable, they again ask themselves if there's something else they can do to get things back on track and moving in the right direction. Asked over and over again, this question, "What else can I do?" reflects the Solve It attitude and mindset that most often differentiates those who win from those who lose.

#### **Solve It Principles**

Four Solve It principles will help you stimulate the creative thinking needed to achieve Key Results:

**Create space for others to fill.** Applying the Solve It step requires openness, authenticity, and humility on the part of the leader. Inviting people to ask "What else can we do?" suggests that the leader expects them to come up with the best answers.

Arrogant, egoistical, and overconfident leaders will often think to themselves, "What else can I do to show people my awesome power?" Hey, look, it's a superhero! What a beautiful cape, what a guy, what a gal! But look again, and you will see someone who easily falls prey to the Emperor's New Clothes syndrome, gaining the verbal admiration of people while failing to win their minds and hearts.

Effective leaders resist the temptation to jump in and Solve It themselves and instead maximize the human capital entrusted to their leadership by encouraging everyone to keep asking, "What else can I do?"

**Engage more brains at work.** Ed Catmull, co-founder of Pixar Animation Studios and president of Pixar Animation and Disney Animation, once disclosed in an interview, "At Pixar, we believe strongly that filmmakers

should develop ideas they are passionate about. This may sound like a no-brainer, but in fact, the big movie studios in Hollywood have whole departments devoted to acquiring and developing projects that will only later be paired with a director for hire.”

“Pixar, by contrast, never buys pitches from the outside. Instead, we encourage our people to build their ideas from scratch and we give them the resources and, crucially, the candid feedback that are required to transform the first wisps of a story into a truly compelling film.”

The Pixar story illustrates an understanding of the basic human desire to create something. Human beings come hardwired with that desire. We involve ourselves in creating and improving the life that surrounds us.

Leaders who invite everyone in their organization to solve and improve the world around them reap the benefits of their people’s innate desire to contribute value to that world.

**Stay engaged, be persistent, think differently, and create new connections.** Stay engaged. Solutions generally come only when you take the initiative to explore, search, and question, even after you think you have done everything you can.

Be persistent. You must constantly ask the Solve It question: “What else can I do?” It makes it possible for you to keep formulating the creative solutions that propel progress.

Think differently. The same thinking that got you into the problem won’t get you out of it. Always solicit and strive to understand a wide range of different, even diametrically opposed, perspectives.

Create new connections. Many solutions require innovative approaches that tap into unfamiliar ways of thinking about a problem. You can take advantage of new perspectives by forging relationships with people you may not have previously considered as sources of good ideas.

Previously unconsidered relationships may include your competitors, your suppliers and vendors, or someone in another department in the company.

**Maintain a culture intent on achieving key results.** Ironically, some people interpret the Solve It question as “What more can I do?” which is not the same as “What else can I do?” There’s a huge difference between the two. “More” can mean “more of the same old, same old.” It’s not just about doing more!

The word “else” suggests coming up with something new, different. “More” often courts failure; “else” generates creative new thinking that leads to success.

## Do It: Exercising the Will to Do What You See, Own, and Solve

No matter what the task, you must always ask the key Do It question: Who will do what by when?

This question keeps priorities straight by removing confusion and false assumptions about important tasks. If you can’t answer the Do It question, you don’t have a plan or a path forward.

### Do It Principles

No matter how brilliantly you’ve traversed the first three steps, See It, Own It, and Solve It, they mean nothing unless you use them to Do It. The value of “ideation” manifests itself in the “doing.” These four Do It Principles will help you take that final step:

**Learn from failed attempts to Do It.** When it comes to following through on solutions, people tend to fall back Below the Line for two main reasons: an unwillingness to take the risks associated with action and an inability to maintain the discipline it takes to keep going when the going gets tough.

Learning from failed attempts to Do It ultimately means helping yourself and others to Do It. Just as a line separates the behavior needed to deliver on the Key Results from the blame game, an even finer line separates good companies from great ones: the line between Solve It and Do It.

**Recognize that you’re not taking full accountability until you Do It.** The leaders of Redstone Federal Credit Union (RFCU) of Huntsville, Alabama, set their sights on making RFCU the best company in its industry. With 24 branch locations and 830 employees, RFCU had established an outstanding track record over the years, never failing to hit its numbers. RFCU’s leaders wanted even better results.

An extensive internal survey led to two important discoveries: (1) many of the company’s departments functioned in silos, with little or no interaction among key departments, and (2) members of the leadership team were not perfectly aligned behind the company’s mission. The RFCU senior leadership team, led by CEO Joe Newberry, decided to build a corporate Culture of Accountability.

## If leadership is an art, then Above the Line leadership is the ultimate art form.

A series of workshops led by key RFCU executives implemented the Steps to Accountability to create a company-wide commitment to achieving best-in-class status in the industry. To communicate that commitment in a clear and tangible way, they collected every single one of the organization's grievances and complaints and wrote them down on a large hatchet-shaped paper. Then they buried that hatchet. Literally.

Within six months, RFCU's already good-to-great culture became even greater. Cross-functional communication to make sure everyone could See It became a daily cultural trait, and every leader and manager aligned behind the mission to become best in class. The bank ultimately achieved 55 percent growth in annual noninterest income; 1,052 percent increase in loans; and 1,179 percent increase in average annual total member giveback (excluding dividends).

**Make the Do It question part of every meeting.** If you record a typical meeting, you will probably find that it ran over the allotted time, followed an agenda with too many items, did not cover all of those items, and ended with no one knowing what to do and by when to deliver the Key Results.

If you need to improve your meeting culture, make sure that the appropriate people are invited to the meeting; set a specific time limit; and make sure the meeting does not end without answering the Do It question: "Who will do what by when?"

**Never stop until you achieve the key results.** In 1978 an engineer was working in his garage on a way to enhance computer databases that could rival offerings from IBM and other large suppliers. Two years later, the engineer's hard work met with big success when his company, Teradata, sold its first system to a large East Coast company. That accomplishment prompted a huge celebration among Teradata's employees, who had worked together as a close-knit family for two long years.

It was Saturday morning in the parking lot of the Teradata facility, the renovated warehouse that had replaced the garage. A group of 52 excited employees and their families were holding balloons and waving banners with the slogan "Ship the Big One."

The American Van Lines driver who had been contracted to deliver the shipment couldn't help but catch the excitement from the festivities as he climbed into the cab of his 18-wheeler. As the driver started his engine and pulled out of the parking lot with The Big One aboard, the Teradata families cheered wildly. Moved by the moment, the driver waved back, shouting that he would not let them down.

Almost eight hours into his trip, the driver pulled into his first weigh station only to discover that his load weighed 500 pounds more than the legal limit. He knew the overweight problem would require a lot of paperwork and approvals that could cause a full day's delay and prevent Teradata from meeting its promised delivery date.

You can probably imagine how easy it might have been for the driver to fall Below the Line, blaming the company for the overweight problem. After all, it wasn't his fault. However, the driver stayed Above the Line by choosing to do something to solve the problem.

After some quick thinking, he turned the truck around and drove to the nearest truck stop, where he unpacked the truck's winter chains, removed a number of extra water containers and spare chairs, and then hid everything in a nearby ditch under some brush.

When he returned to the weigh station, the truck weighed 50 pounds below the limit. The American Van Lines driver made it to the East Coast and delivered The Big One on time. After hearing about the driver's experience, Teradata congratulated and celebrated him for taking accountability to get the right result.

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### Above the Line Leadership: Holding Yourself and Others Accountable for Results

If leadership is an art, then Above the Line leadership is the ultimate art form. First and foremost, who is the most important person to get Above the Line? Hopefully, you just answered, "I am!" Above the Line leaders work, act, and

live Above the Line. Because they do, they quickly recognize when others have become stuck Below the Line.

How do you coach people to take accountability in a way that motivates them to do their best to overcome the obstacles that block the path to achieving Key Results? Apply the LIFT Accountability Coaching model:

**Listen for obstacles (See It).** Above the Line leaders commit to hearing what others are thinking. They want to know what's getting in the way of achieving the needed results, and they want it all out on the table. They listen intently, withhold judgment, and ask for clarification as needed.

They do not solve problems for their people; they coach their people Above the Line, enabling them to reengage their hearts and minds so they feel responsible for discovering the needed solutions.

**Identify the obstacles you can influence (Own It).** Above the Line leaders help people move from See It to Own It. They do this by encouraging others to identify and prioritize the obstacles they can actually control. Sometimes it helps to list what's in and outside of the team's control.

**Facilitate the Solve It question (Solve It).** Sometimes jarring someone out of the habitual Below the Line thinking requires a little jolt to their psyche. "What if your life depended on it?" can provide that jolt. Regardless of the situation you face, circumstances will not likely improve until you have coached everyone to pack away their excuses for poor results and put on their best thinking caps, asking over and over and over again, "What else can I do to get the result we need?"

**Test for movement (Do It).** The LIFT Accountability Coaching Model is not a problem-solving tool. It's really

a reengagement tool. Success is found with LIFT when people have moved Above the Line and are reengaged in solving the problem.

When testing for movement, if the team or individuals respond by saying something like, "I (we) just don't know what to do," Above the Line leaders have the patience to begin again. They Listen. Identify. Solve. Test. More often than not, people will move and re-engage.

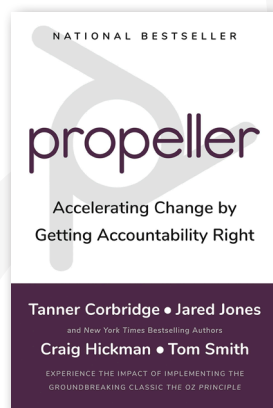
Above the Line leaders get the most out of the LIFT model when they do two things really well: keep people focused on what matters most; and model Above the Line behaviors.

Success comes from applying a more proactive version of accountability—a version focused on *taking* accountability for better results, not being held accountable after the fact. Make taking accountability the way we do things around here, and see how your results change.

Propel yourself, your team, and your organization to a brighter and better future.

#### IF YOU LIKED THIS SUMMARY, YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE:

- *The Oz Principle* by Craig Hickman, Tom Smith, Roger Connors
- *How Did That Happen?* by Roger Connors, Tom Smith



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