

## JOB COACHING AND ACCOUNTABILITY: LESSONS FOR DUSTY

By Judy Hissong, CLM  
President, Nesso Strategies

Last time around we talked about Trusty and the difficulty getting to work on time. This issue we are discussing that assistant of yours who was responsible for the coffee.

### A QUICK RECAP:

Ever notice how playing the blame game hits all of us? First, your receptionist, Trusty, shows up late, but it's not his fault. The traffic was terrible. Then you learn the coffee is gone and the big firm deposition is starting in an hour. You talk with your assistant, Dusty, who is in charge of supplies, but it's not her fault, no one told her they used the last bag.

You sit back down at your desk and already your morning is making your smile become a frown. You ask yourself, 'How does this keep happening?' This discussion leads you to wonder if you have the right people in the right places, and the number of times you've experienced problems with both the supplies being out and the receptionist desk empty until 20 or 30 minutes after the office opens.

### STOP.

What if the problem is a little closer to home? Whoa. What if you are caught in the position of being nice to everyone, and holding no one accountable? Let me explain.

As an administrator you strive to be liked. You work hard to be perceived as fair, and as nice. And likely you are. That's fantastic. The difficulty is that a majority of the time we stop there. We are loved by all, feared by some, and abused by anyone who can get away with it! Do you know this feeling?

If so, it's time to develop a culture of accountability. And, the easiest way to do that is employing job coaching. It's time to shed the embracing of blame, and pass the responsibility to the firm back into the lap of the employee.

### ASSIGNING RESPONSIBILITY

When you hire a new employee you explain the nuts and bolts of the position they are interviewing and/or accepting. You offer the very tangible description of the duties and the reporting lines, and now you also begin explaining that accepting this position is accepting a responsibility to the organization, to the firm in which you are being hired. You, as the manager of the business, are holding the accountability around this responsibility. Your employees are not responsible to you; they are responsible to the firm itself. You create the necessary tension for the tightrope that walks the employee between job responsibility and duty to the firm.

Now let's talk about Dusty. Dusty was hired when the floors of the firm were still dirt — she's been around forever. You didn't interview her with your technique of instilling responsibility and accountability in the hiring process. Now you are ready to introduce this concept to remedy a growing accountability issue around supplies.

You've sorted out the coffee crisis, only the most recent of several supply mishaps where you have had conversations about what is supposed to happen, and maybe even held a staff meeting to demand the staff report to Dusty when the last pencil is pulled from the cabinet. This conversation only bogs down productivity

as you now have the entire staff assisting in Dusty's job. You decide to approach it differently this time and bring Dusty into your office.

You begin with a curious awareness statement – something like this – “I'm noticing an increasing amount of difficulty in keeping our supplies stocked.” It's merely naming what you're seeing and isn't assessing judgment or putting Dusty on the defensive.

Remember, the goal is to improve performance and defensive behavior only stifles performance or causes complete shutdown. You now move to the open ended question, again with curiosity, “What solutions do you have to keeping our supplies stocked so that everyone has what they need for their job responsibilities?” Sit and wait for an answer. If the answer is, “I don't know”, then my favorite response is, “What if you did know?” And wait.

Brainstorm with Dusty as you co-create a solution. Maybe Dusty suggests the staff be responsible for reporting to her when the coffee is used up. If so, you might respond with, “Interesting idea. I'm curious, what are the responsibilities of your job?” You might be surprised about the answer to this one. Keep listening. You'll continue this series of questions and brainstorming until you reach the mutual decision that Dusty will have some proactive measures to track supplies. And you have your mornings to get things done!

In a performance coaching situation, as these two examples personify, you have already identified the outcome before you started on the discussion. You have a specific result you wish to achieve and you want to create open ended questions, which will help the employee co-create the solution. An important and valuable commodity in the coaching world is 'so that'. If you read the question above again, you'll notice that a very powerful shift happens when my question changes to SO THAT everyone has what they need. When you add the 'so that' to your question you are providing the reason for the answer. You are offering the profound and obvious piece of the discussion, which is often times not even in sight of the person you are working with. Give the 'so that' a try for yourself too – you might be surprised how much more you stretch your own skills when you find the end result.

Coaching applies in many other situations. Like the staff or associate meeting when the staff has lots of complaints and no solutions. Or, the associates are rumbling about morale, with no positive comments. Put your “what” cap on, and toss out an open ended question that strikes you curious. Add in a “so that” to your morale or your complaint and quietly listen to the conversation that ensues. I bet you'll be pleasantly surprised at the outcome.

I'm working with all kinds of clients, watching all kinds of success appear in lives of those who are willing to open themselves up to the process. I work with groups, teams, and individuals using the coaching tools to develop workplace harmony, achieve higher performance, and create the next step in career progression. Asking open-ended questions and listening intently will give you amazing new insights and a fun new way to work with people. Let me know how it works for you!

For more information and further reading on Accountability, visit our [online library](#).

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## JUDY HISSONG, CLM

President, Nesso Strategies | Founder, Legal Leadership Institute

Judy understands teams. And she knows how to help you maximize the potential of yours. For over two decades, Judy has applied her vast knowledge of team dynamics, emotional intelligence, work/life balance, leadership, finance, and legal management to help law firms improve their people, process, performance and, ultimately, profits.

Bachelor's Degrees in Accounting and Physical Education | Master's Degree in Sports Management | Former Professional Athlete | Licensed Provider of Emotional Intelligence Tools | Certified Living Your Vision Facilitator | ALA Certified Legal Manager | ACE Certified Personal Trainer | ICF Professional Certified Coach

### CONNECT WITH JUDY

619.546.7885 | [judy@nessostrategies.com](mailto:judy@nessostrategies.com) | [nessostrategies.com](http://nessostrategies.com) | [legalleadershipinstitute.com](http://legalleadershipinstitute.com)



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