

Responsibility

To accept responsibility is to accept and fulfill your obligations and commitments.

Responsibility is an integral part of life. From birth throughout our lives, we are expected to take responsibility. Whether it's learning to talk and walk, earning a living, paying your bills, or raising a family, responsibility is inescapable. There are two ways in which people deal with responsibility, however. There are those who willingly accept and carry out their responsibilities to the best of their abilities and hold themselves accountable for their actions, regardless of the associated burdens. Then there are those who avoid and shirk their responsibilities and refuse to be held accountable for what they do. Life's opportunities are always bestowed upon those people willing to take responsibility, fulfill commitments, and deal with the challenges.

Avoiding responsibilities, in most cases, is caused by a fear of failing, making mistakes, and being blamed for less-than-desirable or flawed outcomes. If you're a person who avoids responsibility

for any of these reasons, learn the appropriate soft skills: problem solving, decision making, how to cope with fear and anxiety. Choosing to continue to avoid responsibility is choosing to fail at life, to be a disappointment to yourself and to those who live and work with you.

When responsible people falter, they get up, figure out what went wrong, get assistance if needed, regroup, and begin anew. They spend their time on what they could have done to improve outcomes and commit that change to memory. Every successful person has a mental list of what not to do again. While they have made their share of mistakes, they have learned from those mistakes. They don't avoid more responsibility; they volunteer for more, having gained confidence from past failures and successes alike.

Winners may fear, but do not avoid new challenges and responsibilities. Heed the *Mistakes to Avoid* and exercise the *Steps to Success* to run your own strong, rewarding race.

Mistakes to Avoid:

- ***Allow fear of failure to keep you from accepting responsibility.*** Result: Risk nothing and gain nothing. Deny yourself a better, more meaningful life.
- ***Accept responsibility without first determining whether you have the knowledge, skills, or abilities to carry it through.*** Result: This is foolish. You are resented if poor results negatively impact others.
- ***Allow pride to keep you from seeking assistance when you realize you cannot meet your responsibilities.*** Result: Needing help is not a weakness unless you ask for it, receive it, and don't learn from it. Every accomplished man or woman has achieved success with help from others; failure is a certainty if you insist on going it alone.
- ***Delegate tasks to individuals with unknown or questionable performance records.*** Result: They will take you down with them. If you expect follow-through from people who have demonstrated repeatedly that they are incapable of following through, they will disappoint you time and again. You will begin to look incompetent.
- ***Blame others when you fail to deliver what you have promised.*** Result: Attempt to remove yourself from the center of blame; the truth will be revealed and you will have earned a reputation for your scapegoating. Friends and colleagues will keep their distance from you.

- ***Fail to plan adequately or pace yourself appropriately.***
Result: Take on more responsibility than you have the time or ability to handle. Cause a domino effect of cascading problems that, left uncontrolled, will continue indefinitely and overwhelm you entirely.

Steps to Success:

1. ***Discuss and define your expected role before accepting additional responsibilities.*** Questions to ask: What do others expect of me in fulfilling this responsibility? What are the desired outcomes? Do I have a clear outline of these expectations? Do I completely understand them? What do I expect of myself? How will this new responsibility affect my ability to fulfill my other responsibilities? Are there some provisions for delegating other interfering responsibilities? Can I honestly take on new duties at this point without undermining the integrity of my current obligations?
2. ***Identify all involved parties and determine how their tasks interrelate with yours. Assess their patterns of responsibility prior to becoming involved.*** Questions to ask: What are my personal strengths and limitations? Where will I need support from others? Where can I provide support to others? What strengths and weaknesses does each team member bring to the effort? Have I expressed my expectations clearly and solicited feedback from all players? Do I understand their expectations? How can I win cooperation and a personal buy-in from each member to ensure that each fulfills his or her responsibilities?
3. ***Identify those less likely to meet their obligations and develop effective management strategies.*** Questions to ask: Are there any team members who historically have failed to fulfill their responsibilities? If so, how can I better motivate these individuals to uphold their part in this effort? How can I ensure close supervision of these members without

- 1.) What are some of the mistakes that are the worst? Why?
2.) What is one good step? What kind of person will you be if you adopt this step?

alienating them? Are there other team members who are particularly skilled at encouraging and inspiring others? If so, would they be able to help keep the less reliable members on track?

4. Clearly define the scope of each individual's responsibility for completing each task. Consider available resources and time requirements. Questions to ask: What are the desired outcomes for each task? What team members have the skills, knowledge, and ability to complete each given task? Are the required resources available? How much time will each individual require to complete each task successfully? Have I obtained feedback from each individual to ensure that we can meet these timelines? Have I factored in possible delays and potential obstacles that may affect our ability to complete this successfully? Have I clearly and accurately informed all parties of their expected roles? Have all team members acknowledged and agreed to their assigned tasks?

5. Acknowledge and accept full personal responsibility for meeting all requirements. Questions to ask: Have I established an effective and timely system for checking the progress of each individual task? Have I delegated appropriate oversight to designated team members? Have I verified the accuracy of feedback and input through all available means? If feasible, do I take time to personally visit team members and ask for feedback? Am I open to hearing problems and suggestions? Have I tapped all available resources to resolve problem areas? Am I equally willing to take responsibility for both successes and failures?

6. Anticipate potential problems and develop effective contingency plans. Questions to ask: Have I asked for input from reliable sources and trusted mentors to predict potential problem areas? Have I developed effective contingency plans for all predictable problems? Have I allowed adequate time to address any unexpected problems that may arise? Have I researched and ensured the availability of the resources required to implement these contingency plans?

7. Acknowledge failure, determine its source, notify stakeholders, and implement an effective contingency plan. Questions to ask: Has a failure occurred? If so, what is the cause and how will it affect the overall project? Have all stakeholders been notified in a timely manner? Have I outlined and communicated an effective plan to fulfill requirements and meet desired outcomes? Have I included an accurate assessment of the impact on established timelines? Have I apologized for any inconvenience this failure may have caused the stakeholders?

8. Evaluate outcomes, including successes and failures. Questions to ask: For successes: What processes were effective? What specific areas of my personal management contributed to this success? What individual team member contributions were outstanding and how can I recognize them? For failures: What did I do wrong that I should avoid in the future? Do I have a trusted advisor who can assist me in evaluating this failure? To what specific areas of my management can I attribute this failure? Have I sought feedback from key personnel and team members? How can I avoid similar problems in the future?