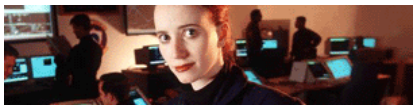

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Counting on accountability

Editorial by Tech. Sgt. Cheresa D. Theiral
Colorado National Guard Public Affairs

The word “accountability” gets tossed around a lot, but do we really know what it means?

Accountability means we’re all responsible for our personal actions. Leaders at every level have to be accountable for those of our subordinates. And at every level, we will be made to bear the consequences – positive and negative.

The word itself has a rather negative connotation, but in my opinion, that’s a cynical view. So I ask you to help change our attitudes by first changing our vocabulary.

To be ***accountable*** is to be ***called to answer*** for something. We answer a call every day just by showing up to work at the right time, in the right uniforms.

To be ***responsible*** is to have an ***obligation***. We owe it to each other and those we serve to ensure we personally do our best every day.

Consequences are simply ***effects***. They too, can be positive or negative. When we arrive and perform duty every day, the mission is accomplished – and our bank accounts bear the fruit of our progress. But if we don’t show as promised by our contracts, or if we don’t deliver as promised, the mission, our reputations and our finances can all suffer.

In simple terms, accountability is the acknowledgment and assumption of responsibility for the decisions and products we make, as well as the actions we do or don’t take, whether in our professional or personal lives. We are each answerable to our leaders and our subordinates, our families who support us, and our taxpayers – without whom many of us would be unemployed.

Accountability means that as a leader, if I know you did everything that was asked, it’s my duty to ensure I step up and support you when the time comes. But if you don’t, you will be held responsible, just higher echelons will hold me accountable.

Bottom line: Accountability isn’t perfection. It’s doing the right thing at the right time, and owning up when we don’t. It’s not a choice. Our profession

up when we don't. It's not a choice. Our profession demands it.

We all have elephants in our closets. Mine are loud and rancid, and they usually start stomping their ugly, hairy feet when I'm contemplating doing something I may regret. They're my constant companions; reminders of mistakes I don't intent to repeat.

I'm not the only one who has them – elephants, skeletons, regrets – whatever you choose to call them. We've all done things we're not proud of, and we all have things we'd do differently if we could. But really, that's a good thing. It means we've learned from past mistakes and we're ready to take our performance – and that of our subordinates – to the next level of greatness.

Expecting subordinates to follow regulations, instructions and orders – and following through when they don't – shouldn't have to be said. It should simply be done.

Knowing my leaders to expect the same of me is just part of the job.

Accountability becomes a bad word when we fail as individuals to first be responsible for ourselves, and spirals downward when leaders don't enforce what's right or don't behave according to standards.

To be without accountability is to be without discipline. Lack of discipline cracks our foundation. If poor performance is allowed, others must to work harder to make up for deficiencies. When this happens, morale declines. It's a slippery slope with jagged edges.

In essence, if irresponsibility is acceptable for one person, why not for all? As leaders, if we allow just one person to behave poorly, the effects of our inactions could tear us all to shreds – literally and figuratively.

But if we expect accountability, and behave accordingly at every rank, we will prevail.

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