

# Succeed on Purpose

Holding people accountable  
creates a win for everyone.

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# It's nice to see accountability as the victor.

**L**eadership, by former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani, celebrates the wonders of accountability and the spirit of America. Who would have ever thought that a government organization could be so transformed?

## The Big Apple in Trouble

In the 1980s and 1990s, New York City averaged 9,000 to 10,000 felonies a week and between 1,800 and 2,200 murders a year. (If you think it's difficult to turn around production trends, consider overcoming that challenge!) New York's dangerous reputation was legendary, and having grown up in the northeastern corner of Pennsylvania, I heard about its problems firsthand.

Then, consider what happened on September 11, 2001. This catastrophe would have broken a weaker city. The detailed account of the devastation that occurred during the attack on the World Trade Center is riveting, but what is also remarkable was the foundation of governance that enabled the city to rise from the dust. Its turnaround was not an accident. The people of New York succeeded on purpose.

The city's success really amazed me for several reasons. First, having worked for the federal government as a 23-year-old with big dreams, I saw how stifling our civil service system can be at all levels. There was very little accountability, raises were fixed, and we were discouraged from outpacing our coworkers, many of whom had job security equal to that of a tenured teacher. This methodology was called "career status," and it meant that it practically took an act of Congress to fire someone. Eventually, I came to feel that if I continued to work in the civil service, I would end up brain-dead.

It is not easy to get a government organization to chart a new course. Some think the bureaucratic red tape makes it insurmountable. The joke in the hallways often likened it to turning an enormous aircraft carrier. But clearly the huge lesson to be learned from New York's example is that the principles of leadership in running a private organization are just as applicable to a government organization, as long as they are made with a clear purpose and allowed to take hold in the culture.

## Focus on Accountability

This momentous change toward accountability began with ample motivation: the escalating crime rate. Nonviolent, nuisance crimes, such as graffiti and unlicensed vendors, were being overlooked as the city became paralyzed by more serious crimes. For example, the government ignored escalating complaints about windshield washers leaping into traffic to clean car windows and demanding money. Washers would hit cars with their squeegees if they were not paid what they deemed enough.

The turning point was the revelation that the government could not ignore petty crimes. Although not as threatening as major, violent crimes, the small offenses contributed to an environment where people did not feel safe walking — or driving — down the street. When that happened, residents switched neighborhoods and tourists stopped visiting. With fewer people to serve and provide products to, businesses closed or refused to move in. As a result, the city was forced to raise taxes to compensate for the missing revenue. At the same time, tax revenues and city services continued to decline as the city spiraled downward.

The biggest initiative that the mayor and his department heads executed to reverse these trends was to increase the level of accountability throughout the city, starting with the windshield washers. An official finally figured out that they were breaking a law that they could be cited for: jaywalking. When police hauled in the squeegee men and ran record searches, they often discovered the offenders had lengthy rap sheets for other crimes. Suddenly, the problem was solved.

The next step was holding borough police stations accountable. Officers were required to write up crime reports and enter them into a computerized system immediately after a crime. Previously, the crime statistics were too old to be useful. With constant updating, police officials were able to evaluate statistics in real time and identify hot spots to focus on. At the same time, as described in *Leadership*, they "set their sights on clarifying the purpose of the Police Department and crafting indicators to tell them whether their goals were being met: accountability again."

This new process was called Compstat. At its heart was the weekly meeting, often referred to as the "crown jewel in the administrations' push for accountability." Here, borough command's feet were held to the fire, previously a tough task in a highly unionized department. But even though these borough officials could not be fired, they were motivated to improve when faced with a demotion or transfer. The Compstat meeting also provided a forum for planning and fine-tuning the team's goals and recognizing effective team members.

The results were truly extraordinary! Over eight years, the city realized dramatic decreases in crime trends, especially in overall crime and murder rates — down 70 percent and 65 percent, respectively — as well as decreases in overtime expenditures and sick leave.

Even with a population of 8 million city residents (and more than 18 million in the greater metropolitan area), New York City's crime statistics were excessive in every way when compared to cities across the country. The city finally had enough and decided to take action. Instead of using the typical government solution of raising taxes

and throwing money at it, they took a more pragmatic approach. They poured the foundation they would later need to help them react to other crises.

Fast forward to today, and New York City's turnaround is even more impressive. It was accomplished through good leadership and more effective systems that have become a part of the overall culture of the city government.

### **Accountability Works!**

During these days of frequently heard doom and gloom, it is even more of a pleasure to read a success story. In a society where many seem to be playing the victim (and getting rewarded for it), it's nice to see accountability as the victor. New York made a willful, conscious decision to take responsibility and implement the checks and balances necessary to reverse the trends. As Guiliani wrote, "All enterprises benefit from increased accountability."

That leads me to the final reason why I was so impressed with this real-life success story: the Compstat system demonstrated the essence and elements of an effective activity management system at its best — the kind of system that can be found in the most success-

ful firms across the country. They start with a purpose, define their goals, develop and collect metrics to measure their effectiveness, coach the team members to improve and use both positive and negative reinforcements to hold people accountable for their behavior.

Numbers matter. Recording and tracking vital trends helps avoid the tendency to distort reality based on emotions. We can all learn from New York City's example of effectively combining old and new technology to achieve results. That's what we at SAM do. We help industry producers and leaders ... succeed on purpose.



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SAM's mission is to help producers succeed and leaders to lead by providing the most effective activity management resources available anywhere that inspire confidence and success. Mickey can be reached at [Mickey@SAMusa.com](mailto:Mickey@SAMusa.com).