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Is Accountability Something to Celebrate or Fear?

As I sat down to draft this response I heard a crashing noise from the adjoining room. Upon entering I observed my 4 year old sitting in the middle of what appeared to be thousands of LEGO's with an expression of pure innocence. As I asked him what had happened? He quickly responded with a meager, "nothing." Having predicted his response; I quickly fueled the conversation with, "how did all of your LEGO's end up on the floor?" and with lightning fast instinct, he delivered the highly anticipated, "I don't know."

I start this critical conversation piece with this story to illustrate the underlying connection between the idea of accountability and the absolute essential characteristic of ownership. In my son's scenario, he was fearful of getting in trouble and instead of simply accepting that he spilled his Lego's, he decided to avoid the situation by pretending that it did not happen. By definition, the term accountability is defined as "an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions." In terms of expectations around educational leadership, we are faced with the bottom-line challenge of embracing federal, state and local resources to ensure increases in student achievement. We are to interpret and infuse the evolution of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the newest revisions around the blue print of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in a society that has been pummeled by an economic downturn and an abundance of barriers that would provide ample opportunities to disregard the urgency of a national decrease in student achievement. With countless factors that could be used to unsuccessfully rationalize the "why's?" we are finally presented with a genuine opportunity and an eager willingness to truly lead.

As we approach national standards the multiple targets of the past will dissipate and we will reach common expectations that will provide ALL stakeholders with firm footing for the work that lies ahead. Dr. John Kotter, widely regarded as the business world's foremost authority on leadership and change sets a tone for our current mission in his book, *A Sense of Urgency*. He illustrates the differences between true and false senses of urgency and summarizes our plight with the idea that "true urgency is driven by a deep determination to win, not an anxiety about losing." As leaders, we do not have the

luxury of fearing consequences as it would translate to deeper missed opportunities for our students and with that we must continue to challenge ourselves to not accept mediocrity as an option. Collaboratively, we will redefine “winning” through the only lens that matters – that of continued increases in student achievement and pure evidence of each and every student’s ability to reciprocate their ownership of tomorrow. We must press forward with relentless conviction in our investment of standards based education and model ownership that is tireless in its pursuit of delivering the promise of increased knowledge acquisition.

Kotter, J. P. (2008). *A sense of urgency*. Boston, Mass: Harvard Business Press.

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