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## Ten Principles for People First Mastery

### What are the principles on which the People First philosophy is based?

In order to understand the richness of meaning, the depth of significance, and the profitable implications of the People First philosophy, it is of paramount importance to fully comprehend the governing principles on which the People First philosophy is established.

Every philosophy and system of thought is based on a set of principles or axioms that governs and guides the effective practice of that philosophy. Every professor of physics will begin her class with a detailed study of the underlying principles of physics before she delves into the methodology of her subject.

Similarly, the People First philosophy is not based on a set of constantly changing techniques or methods. It has been said that methods are many but principles are few; methods fade away but principles never do.



This is not meant to disparage the idea of methodology. Without a specific set of methods, the inherent value of an organizational philosophy or college class will never come to fruition. Theory without practice is dead; however, practice without theory is blind. In other words, the practice of everything is the practice of some theory—i.e., some philosophical principles. It logically follows that the methods that one employs are only as good as the soundness of

the philosophical foundation on which those methods rest and come forth. The incorporation of sound furnishing does not make up for an unsound foundation.

In other words, principles, if they have passed the truth test—that is, if they manifest internal self-consistently and coherence and have produced profitable results in the past—are timeless with respect to their validity, efficacy, and utility. Hence, they become worthy, immutable objects for our belief and trustworthy guides for our present and future practice.

It follows, then, that a principle-based program is intellectually and strategically superior to a technique-based program. Why? Because methods and techniques don't govern and guide methods and techniques. Only truth-based principles, because of their epistemological nature, are worthy

of governing and guiding the effective, sustainable results of methods and techniques.

The best developmental methods can only come from the best principles because the quality of the methods are inextricably and unalterably related to the quality of the axiomatic principles from which they are born. An appropriate analogy for this idea would be Euclidian geometry, in which the theorems that are deduced from the four fundamental axioms

are only as good as the axioms on which they logically depend. Operational methods are to business principles what geometric theorems are to Euclid's axioms.

If you ask any mature, veteran organizational development person, they will all

unequivocally assert that the rudimentary order for organizational development begins with the primacy of one's thinking on principles *first*; the methodology for development is *second* in the order of business. To switch metaphors, there can be no sustainable fruit without a well-developed root system from which the fruit receives its life-giving support.

Principles provide the necessary systemic framework that keeps all methods and techniques in their proper cognitive balance and establishes mutually supporting relationships—each related to the other and to the whole—in an hierarchical, coherent, interdependent order.

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PEOPLE FIRST®



The fatal flaw of many leadership development programs and organizational development courses is that they are not based on a specific set of normative, epistemological, systemic principles. Therefore, these programs lack the hierarchical structure of an intellectually mature mind that has been structured according to a rigorous set of truth-based, timeless principles. The principle-based mind, therefore, is in possession of a unique quality of philosophical and strategic discernment. There is no admixture, confounding, or conflating of fundamental principles with their derivative methodology that would blur their cognitive distinctions or hierarchical order.

Thus, unless a person has the intellectual discernment to distinguish between fundamental thinking (principle-based) and derivative thinking (technique-based), he or she will always be susceptible to the next business sophist peddling his latest ersatz developmental program.

These People First principles will keep your mind fad-proof and psychobabble-proof. Once leaders become learned with regard to principle-based thinking, they will be armed with the best conceptual questions to be able to choose the best tools, techniques, and methods to create the best developmental programs.

One of the key maxims that we live by at People First International is this: *The personal drives the professional.* We believe that cultural transformation must begin as a very intentional journey of personal development for each individual leader. Leaders must dedicate time to study the Ten People First Principles and understand what each principle means individually and what these principles mean to them personally. Thus, cultural transformation is predicated on personal transformation.

Starting down this path of personal development with respect to adopting these principles and committing to live by them as a disciplined way of life is the most difficult challenge a leadership team will ever undertake. The reason this is so difficult for many leadership teams is because it requires a great deal of deep personal reflection. Many leaders don't set aside the time required for the deep reflection that fuels their own personal growth. However,

it is impossible for a leadership team to lead a principle-based organization unless each leader's life is governed and transformed by the very principles that they espouse.

If you are going to build a great company, it must be based on great leadership that models the great principles that the culture is built on. Everyone in the organization must be instructed in those fundamental, life-giving principles and understand that the "How," "Why," and "What" behind everything they do is governed and guided by belief in those ennobling, inspiring, timeless principles.

The following Ten People First Principles are timeless; they will work for all nations, cultures, governments, organizations, communities, families, and individuals ... *if* they agree to the philosophical tenants of these principles. They have transformed thousands of people's lives. These People First principles will take your personal and professional relationships both to whole new levels of dignity, respect, honor, caring, nurturing, and appreciation for one another. Enjoy the journey!

## 1. Principle of Knowledge

The Principle of Knowledge is the first and most important principle of these ten principles of the People First philosophy. It is first because the system of knowledge that you choose forms your philosophical axiom from which you interpret the





meaning of all reality. Your system of knowledge is critical to your intellectual development because it should provide you with a whole view of things thought out together. In other words, your system of knowledge becomes your worldview, from which you make sense of all the parts of your world. Thus, it is vitally important that your worldview should be derived from a coherent, self-consistent, and inerrant system of knowledge.

Profound knowledge and profound understanding—a whole view of things thought out together in a coherent, self-consistent, and inerrant system—is what distinguishes the People First Leadership philosophy from the Ph.D. leadership programs that are currently offered in our colleges

and universities today. This first Principle of Knowledge forms the epistemological foundation on which the other nine People First principles are established and derive their profound meaning and methodology.

If you have ever taken a course in philosophy, you were introduced to the word *epistemology*. Epistemology is the first branch of philosophy; this educational domain is solely concerned with the theory of knowledge. It asks the question, “How do you know?”

“How do you know?” is the question of all questions. Every field of human endeavor begins with an assertion of knowledge. Every educational institution that is an epistemologically self-conscious institution of higher learning has answered this question—“How do you know?” These universities know *what* they know and *how* they know what

they know. They have written very cogently in their catalogues *why* you must know what they know.

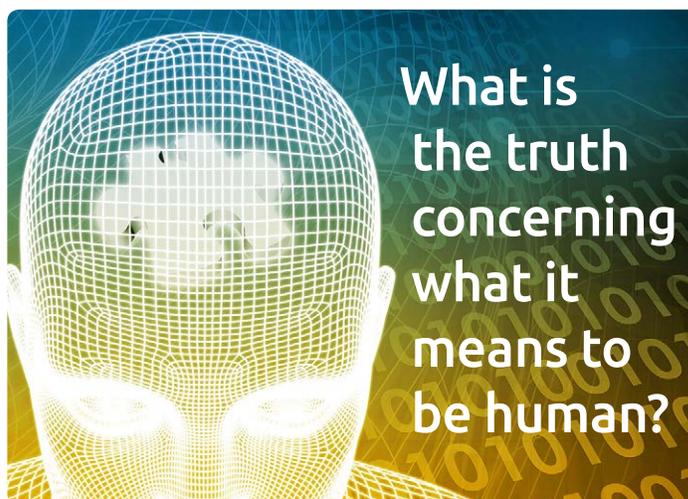
In other words, all educational institutions claim to have knowledge with respect to their particular field of human development. That is why students choose a specific university to pursue their Ph.D. in a particular field of education ... because that university claims to have the most advanced knowledge and understanding of that subject.

Therefore, the study of epistemology is not just

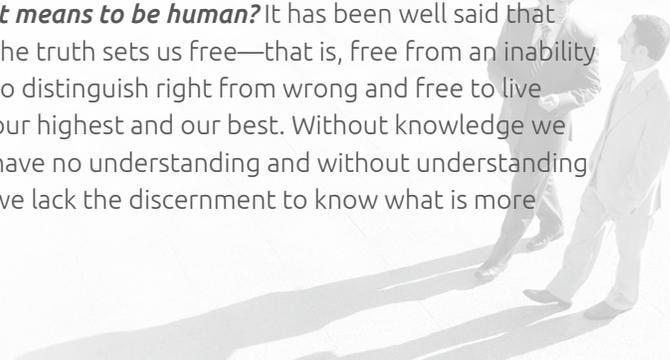
“nice” to know; it is the fundamental axiom on which all human development is based. It alone governs and guides the advancement of every field of education. Whatever vocation you have chosen with respect to your career—whether it is a for-profit or non-profit business, the private or public sector—the success or failure of your career rests entirely

on the veracity and validity of the knowledge claim of your vocation. If you are serious about the growth and development of your business, you will become an avid student of epistemology. Your growth in the study of epistemology will give you a sustainable competitive advantage with regard to an advanced understanding of the philosophy of knowledge.

It is important to understand that knowledge, by definition, is the knowledge of the truth. The mature People First leader is a student of the truth. Therefore, the first question that the People First leader ask is this: ***What is the truth concerning what it means to be human?*** It has been well said that the truth sets us free—that is, free from an inability to distinguish right from wrong and free to live our highest and our best. Without knowledge we have no understanding and without understanding we lack the discernment to know what is more



**What is  
the truth  
concerning  
what it  
means to  
be human?**





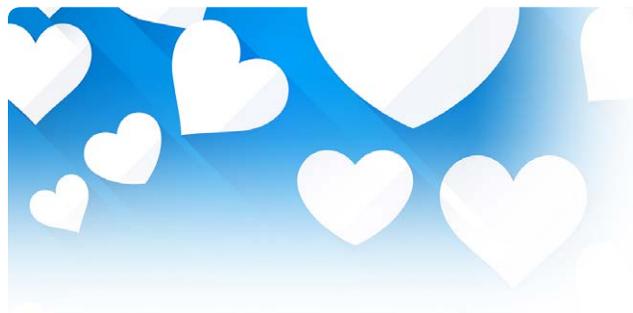
important, what is less important, and what is not important at all when it comes to how we should interact with all human beings and what brings out the best in every person.

The nine People First principles which follow are all solely based on the knowledge of the truth with respect to the way that human beings want to be treated, valued, and appreciated in light of the knowledge of what it means to be human. These principles are based on the knowledge that all human beings are created equal—possessing the same innate exalted dignity, exalted worth, and sanctity of soul. No human is “more human” than another because of their race, religion, gender, socioeconomic status, intellect, education, or accomplishments. Our incredible humanity makes us all walking marvels, masterpieces, and miracles. We all possess amazing untapped potential, gifts, and talents. The minds and creative abilities of human beings staggers the imagination!

Consider all the amazing improvements that men and women have invented in the last 100 years ... for that matter, in the last 20 years! Consider this: the iPad was released in April of 2010. Now tablets are so ubiquitous that we might think they've been around much longer! You and I share the same fertile, human mind that created the smartphone and the Blu-ray player. If we can stop being prisoners of our own self-importance, we will see all of the magnificent potential that exists all around us.

As a society we have forgotten what it means to be human. We can put a man on the moon, but we can't see the marvels in the man. The world is crying out for other people to become faithful advocates, ambassadors and stewards of the potential, sanctity, and dignity of their humanity. Let's join our hearts and our hands in a concerted effort to humanize our organizations, communities, and nations by proclaiming the profound knowledge of the immeasurable dignity and incalculable value of all people, which infinitely supersedes the value of all of the wealth that any organization or nation could produce.

## 2. Principle of Love



The second Principle of Love is the first fruit and logical outcome, in terms of a person's behavior, once they have accepted the knowledge of the truth concerning what it means to be human. A mature People First leader will demonstrate their love for other people by putting other people first over their own thoughts, desires, and interests. Once a leader truly believes that all human beings are created equal, possessing immeasurable dignity, incalculable worth, and sanctity of soul, the next logical step in their growth as leaders is to consciously and intentionally change their behavior and treat every human being in a more loving, kind, and caring manner.

Soldiers have laid down their lives for their brothers-in-arms, and this sacrificial death is the greatest expression of love that one human being can show to another. Mature love is self-sacrificial in nature, in that it constantly seeks the well-being of others over its own well-being as its primary purpose in life. An attitude of sacrificial love embraces the counterintuitive idea of “What can I *give* to this person?” rather than “What can I *get* from this person?” Pure love is unconditional; there are no strings attached. Pure love delights in blessing others freely. It wants nothing and needs nothing in return.

Leaders who are maturing in love spend more time thinking of others and less time thinking about themselves ... without thinking less of themselves. We are in desperate need of people in this world who are more loving toward one another! Everywhere we turn today, we see media accounts of egregious acts of people hating and destroying one another. Love edifies the lover and hate destroys the hater.



Loving people delight in loving on others. You may ask, “What’s in it for them?” The answer is that they truly enjoy watching people light up, glow, and radiate when they are loved simply and purely for nothing other than their humanity! Moreover, love is a verb. It goes far beyond the words that merely say “I love you.” In other words, mature love is a selfless action. Love shows up in bad times as well as good times. True love understands that it always costs the lover something in order to love the beloved. In other words, mature love gives joyfully even when it is not convenient to love. Love, by definition, gives unconditionally and never counts the cost with regard to what it will have to give up in order to love the beloved. Thus, love is not a feeling to be felt but a disciplined commitment to be kept ... even when you don’t feel like behaving in a loving manner.

The Principle of Love is the most transformative principle with respect to its life-giving effect on the human psyche. That is because love is the greatest need in the heart of every human being. Every person has a deep longing within their human spirit to be loved and to love someone. As the old maxim states, love makes the world go around.

There is nothing more inspiring and ennobling to the mind than to behold the self-sacrificial love of a mother for her child. If you were raised in a normal home, you have experienced the love of such a mother. That was your first contact with unconditional love. And there is nothing more liberating and exhilarating to a human being than to be loved unconditionally.

What does all this talk about love have to do with running a business? Simply this: every person who walks through the doors of your organization wants you to simply love them. It’s true that your new hires

will not approach you on their first day on the job and say, “I am desperately looking for a boss to love me unconditionally!” *But that is what every person desires.* They want to be loved for who they are as a human being, not as a “human doing.” We were all human beings *first* before we started “doing” something. We were loved and celebrated for a few years as human beings, *long* before we became human doings.

It is very important to issue a disclaimer: this Principle of Love is *not* suggesting that everyone in an organization should run around with maudlin sentimentality, crying out incessantly, “I love you, man!” While the People First Principle of Love doesn’t diminish or disallow verbal expressions of love, but this principle finds its greatest manifestation in loving *behaviors*. You know when someone loves you—and they never have to say a word about it—because they always seek to put your interest, your needs, and your well-being before their own.

So if you want to become the greatest People First leader on the planet then become

the greatest lover of people on the planet! It all starts in the leader’s mind. If you begin to start practicing loving thoughts in your mind toward all the people you lead—coupled with loving behaviors, harboring no thoughts of ill-will—it is more than likely that you will begin to observe a profound positive shift in their attitudes and behaviors toward you. And you should not be surprised to see a significant improvement with respect to their attitude and behavior toward their job!

DDI asserts that 50% of employees leave their jobs primarily because of a poor relationship with their boss. This unconscionably high percentage could be dramatically decreased if leaders would learn and diligently practice the People First Principle of Unconditional Love.





### 3. Principle of Dignity

The third People First Principle of Dignity is a logical corollary of the second Principle of Love, because when you love someone you will treat them with the utmost dignity. Furthermore, the principle of treating others with the utmost dignity draws on the first principle of the transformational knowledge of what it means to be human.

This knowledge of our sacred humanity supplies every person with the logic behind why we should treat every human being exceptionally well. We should all make it our goal that people walk away from our every interpersonal encounter thinking, “I have never met anyone in my life that has treated me with the utmost dignity, respect and honor as this person has!”



We need to spend more time talking to children about the importance of living lives characterized by ever-increasing dignified, respectful, and honoring behaviors. We should treat each other like brothers and sisters, like royal members of a royal family—the human family! The world needs to be inspired by what dignity looks like with skin on, in both good times and bad. We should freely love, respect, and honor our fellow brothers and sisters because of the inherent dignity that they possess by virtue of being human.

We see undignified behaviors in the workplace when people make rude, insensitive remarks in front of their coworkers that devalue and belittle their culture, race, gender, religion, or political views. A People First leader will speak to these egregious behaviors; he or she will unambiguously assert that this inflammatory, intemperate, and indelicate speech will not be tolerated in their organization and that there will be negative consequences for the person who continues to behave in this manner.

This clear communication creates the philosophical boundaries that define what a dignified People First culture is ... and what it is not.

Members of a dignified People First culture that is shaped by the constant example of their leaders' dignified behavior knows that if they are about to say something that may be inappropriate, they should not express what they are thinking. They have been taught by their People First leaders that if what they are about to say has even a remote possibility of being perceived as an inappropriate, offensive, or intolerant remark then they should not say what they think—even if it might get them a good laugh—because that remark carries the cost of hurting someone's feelings and destroying their worth as a human being.

The Principle of Dignity in a People First culture is always at the forefront of every interpersonal interaction, guiding and governing every behavior without equivocation. When dignity becomes a guiding principle in an organization, external customers instantly notice the difference in terms of how everyone honors and respects one another internally. The more that customers interact with a company that is obsessed with being the exemplars to the world in terms of showcasing their dignified department, the more those customers want to experience that culture, because they thoroughly enjoy being treated in such a magnanimous manner. Customers keep coming back to that company and buying their products and services because no one else even comes *close* to treating them so well.

Five star restaurants figured this out many years ago. If you treat your customers like you are serving kings and queens—that is, if you make them feel like they are the most important people in the world to you—they will become your customers for life. Ritz-Carlton hosts classes explaining their “Legendary Service,” which the company simply describes as “Ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen.”

There is another point that must be considered with respect to establishing a People First culture characterized by the ennobling principle and virtue of dignity. Have you ever encountered a server or



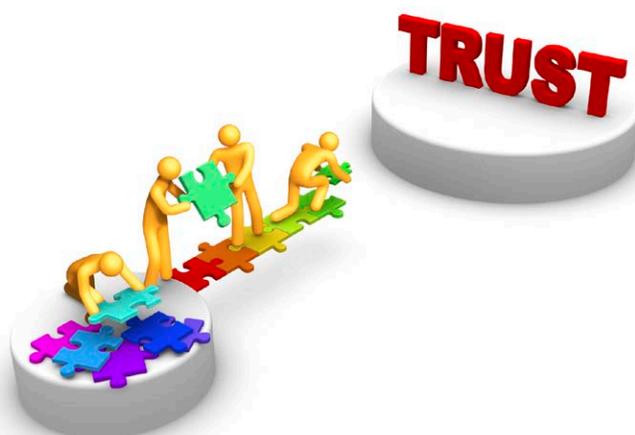
customer service person, only to determine within just a few minutes of meeting them that their behavior was perfunctory—that they were relating to you out of a sense of duty rather than from a heart-felt sense of desire? We have all interacted with men and women who are inauthentic. It doesn't take a PhD in psychology to discern their disingenuous behavior. They are “nice” because they had been *trained* to “be nice” ... but it clearly is not their nature!

If your desire is to create a culture where everyone treats all people with the utmost dignity at all times, then you must only hire people who are currently treating everyone they know with the utmost dignity. You don't hire people and then train them to treat people with dignity. Why? Because treating people with dignity is a character trait, and you can't train new hires to develop their character. Either they possess that character trait and live their lives on the Principle of Dignity ... or they don't. In the world that we live in today—which places little value on sound character and principled behavior but fawns over shallow charisma—it takes more time to find the right hire who will truly represent the uncompromising character of your culture of dignity. Dignity is, first and foremost, a disciplined state of mind. It is an abiding belief married to a specific set of honoring and respectful behaviors that look for every opportunity to manifest the excellency of what dignity looks like with skin on. When a People First leader fully embraces the inspiring import of the Principle of Dignity and chooses to practice its behaviors daily, they are transformed into a beautiful servant-leader. When leaders become evangelistic about the virtues of treating people with dignity and the highest esteem, your organization will reap an unprecedented harvest of likeminded customers who are looking to do business with a character-driven company.

#### 4. Principle of Trust

The Principle of Trust is one of the most important principles that a People First Leader can learn for building a life of sound character. The first three People First Principles of knowledge, love, and

dignity provide a leader with the virtuous foundation on which to build a trustworthy life. When leaders stand on the knowledge of the truth, coupled with a loving heart that genuinely and consistently seeks to treat everyone with the utmost dignity, respect, and honor then they have diligently prepared themselves to live a life characterized by high trust.



Why is it so important for People First Leaders to grow in their appreciation for the Principle of Trust? Why must they understand and embrace it? The answer is that there is nothing more fundamental to the quality of life within all relationships—whether in friendships, families, organizations, and even civilizations—than the trust that one person places in another for safety, stability, and service. And since human beings are not self-sufficient, self-contained, and self-satisfied, we will only accomplish our goals through forming social networks and social contracts. These contracts *only* work if people trust one another. Therefore, trust is the glue that holds every society together.

It is critical to point out the dynamic nature of trust. Once you have established a relationship of trust with another person, that doesn't imply that you can stop building and maintaining the trust equity that you have created. It may take years to earn someone's trust, yet it can be destroyed with a single look or word. Sometimes that bridge of trust will be so badly damaged that it can never be repaired. Thus, trust capital is the most important currency



we can possess! Homes, schools, organizations, and communities must *all* be built on a network of relationships in which everyone knows that you are a person of your word—that is, your word is your bond. When a person values the truthfulness of their word more than wealth, they have then acquired *true* wealth: the wealth of character.

Let us consider the cornerstone of every nation: the family. What happens to the dynamics of the family when the members no longer trust one another? The family disintegrates ... and as the individual families of a nation fall apart, so the nation begins to become unstable.

You may well be asking yourself what the health of a nation has to do with you as a People First Leader. The answer is simple: your organization is made up of people, and all those people have families. As

you help those families become more trustworthy in *all* of their relationships, you are not only contributing to the well-being of

those families, but to the stability and well-being of your organization ... and, by extension, to the health of your nation as well. When you as a leader help even one person at your company to become more trustworthy, you are setting in motion a change model that will bring about a healthier world—one person, one family, one organization, and one community at a time.

There is another critical point that must be asserted about this guiding Principle of Trust with respect to change management models. Most change management models focus primarily on changing *organizations*. However, this is a misplaced focus; the true genesis of sustainable organizational change—as well as multigenerational and societal change—always begins with the individual.

Change is an individual issue and an individual responsibility. I have often said that organizations

don't grow, develop, and change; only *individuals* bring about long-term change. And all change begins with trust in the word of an individual. Organizational growth and development depends on how well the individuals within an organization trust one another. Low-trust translates into low performance and low productivity, which creates low profits.

In addition, innovation and creativity spring forth from individuals who live and work within trust-rich cultures. When high trust is modeled by leaders of high moral character and all purpose partners understand that all members of the team trust one another and “have each other's back,” there is a natural willingness to share ideas and collaborate with one another in order to more effectively solve internal and external problems and create innovative solutions. High-trust translates into

high-performance and high-productivity, which creates high-profits!

When high-trust becomes the behavioral norm that is reinforced,

recognized, and rewarded, every business unit views all others as interdependent purpose partners. This cumulative high-trust capital spawns a supportive culture that breaks down barriers and builds cross-functional bridges of collaboration and creativity.

A high-trust culture sees people's differences as a reason for celebration, not a source of irritation. People think less of titles and territory ... blaming and shaming ... resentment and resistance ... protecting and preserving. Instead, they think more in terms of communication and collaboration ... synergy and service ... enrichment and empowerment ... recognition and celebration.

A culture that is committed to consistently modeling trust-based relationships eliminates insular thinking, turf protection, one-upmanship, inferior decision-making, and misalignment and misunderstanding between individuals and departments. A high-trust

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Trust and truth are corollary concepts because *truth is the only foundation for trust.*

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culture prevents duplication of efforts and removes any perception in the customer's mind that the company is disconnected or disorganized. The unequivocal trust that every person has placed in one another is the fertile soil that nourishes the manifestation of impeccable character, incomparable competence, unassailable confidence, courageous caring, respectful communication, shared consistency, and a relentless commitment to treating each other exceptionally well.

Business units freely and willingly give and receive the necessary information and support that equips their purpose partners to exceed the expectations of both their internal and external customers. The right hand always knows what the left hand is doing and why, because both hands are always working together in harmony, trusting each other to do the right thing for one another at the right time and for the right reasons.

Customers of this trust-rich culture become the company's raving fans and would never consider changing brands or suppliers, simply because they totally *trust*—not only the products and services of the company, but far more importantly, they trust the leaders and individuals they interact with to stand behind the claims of their products and services.

So what must a leader who sincerely wants to improve their individual trustworthiness *do*? People First Leaders will look in the mirror and ask themselves some soul-searching questions. And the only place to begin this personal inquiry is to examine the quality of their trustworthiness at home. If you and I can't create trust in our own home, how can we ever develop a reputation for being a high trust leader in the workplace? The home is the quintessential lab where every leader can learn how to create, maintain, and nurture trust-based relationships. Without those relationships, a person is living an impoverished existence.

Trust is all about trustworthiness. No one will ever trust another person if that person habitually gives out clues that they are untrustworthy. A People First Leader who truly desires to build their trust capital will ask their family members and/or closest friends

if there are any blind spots concerning clues of mistrust that they may be inadvertently conveying. The personal always drives the professional; the best people to enlist to hold a mirror up to your face so that you can see any blemishes in your trustworthiness are those who know you best and whom you trust the most.

Every day, people—often unwittingly—give out clues with regard to how trustworthy they are. Trust and truth are corollary concepts because *truth is the only foundation for trust*. If your word is truthful then you will be known and admired as a trustworthy person. Strive to become rich in trust and you will become rich in one of the most important areas of life: that is, rich in the bank of trust-capital you are building in all of your relationships.

## 5. Principle of Humility

The Principle of Humility is a guiding principle that every leader *must* keep at the forefront of every thought and action so that they don't allow any arrogance to shut down the amazing gifts and talents of others. Hubris (that is, excessive pride) is the polar opposite of humility; if a leader's behavior is characterized by hubris, everyone around them knows that only the hubristic leader is allowed to have any power. The self-aggrandizement of the hubristic leader diminishes their organization's potential to achieve breakthrough results. Hubris is the Number One killer of organizational growth and development.

In his definitive work, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins reported, "In over two-thirds of comparison cases (average/good companies), we noted the presence of a gargantuan personal ego that contributed to the demise or continued mediocrity of the company."

Jim Collins published another book after *Good to Great*—*How The Mighty Fall: And Why Some Companies Never Give In*—that brought even more detailed evidence to light about the devastation that hubristic leadership wreaks on American businesses. Collins chronicled what he calls "The Five Stages of Decline," through which a hubristic mindset will lead a company toward a dead-end destiny.



The five stages are:

- Stage 1: Hubris Born of Success
- Stage 2: Undisciplined Pursuit of More
- Stage 3: Denial of Risk and Peril
- Stage 4: Grasping for Salvation
- Stage 5: Capitulation to Irrelevance or Death

Jim Collins' books are tremendous wake-up calls for every wise leadership team that recognizes that no leader is immune to the mind-numbing and intoxicating effects of Hubris Born of Success. However, People First Leaders who are clear-eyed about their own proclivity to hubristic behaviors keep an eternal vigilance over their desire to over-assert themselves and control and dominate others through their positional power.

The Principle of Humility rests on the eternal truth that all human beings are created equal. Therefore, there is no logical premise for an attitude of superiority; there is *no* legitimate occasion for any display of arrogance. Consequently, when a person makes another person feel inferior to them, they are displaying a marked unbelief about the inestimable worth and dignity of their fellow human brother or sister.

Humble people don't think more highly of themselves because they recognize it is simply not true. *All* men, women, and children are walking marvels, masterpieces, and miracles! All people

have an inestimable treasure trove of gifts to bestow on others.

One of the most easily-observed clues of humility is the amount of talking a person does during a conversation. Humble people do more listening than talking. A humble person's behavior is characterized by not interrupting others and constantly talking over the words of others, because they feel no inordinate desire to be the center of attention. In light of the gift of our exalted human dignity and worth, we should approach one another with humble hearts, gratefully recognizing our co-equal status as highly esteemed royal members of the same exalted human family. If we truly desire to live humble lives, we should be known as the best listeners in the world—first to our families and friends, then to our purpose partners, and ultimately to everyone with whom we come in contact.

Why is it that you meet so very few people who are good listeners? Sadly, far too many people have become prisoners of their own self-importance; they constantly want to impress you with who they are and what they know. They are *anything* but humble, and tend to be the last one to realize what everyone else knows: that they are grossly self-absorbed! They start every conversation by talking about themselves; they are not truly interested in you or what you are interested in, because none of that serves them. The hubristic leader believes that you exist to listen to them, to be enthralled by them, and to become





enamored with their brilliance and powerful grasp of the obvious. They are driven by an inordinate desire to demonstrate that they are the smartest person in the room. A conversation with them is filled with self-referencing and self-validation.

Why is it so difficult for so many of us to practice humility? Because when anyone has a diminished sense of self and doesn't truly believe that they already possess immeasurable worth, inestimable dignity, and sublime sanctity of soul, they must constantly seek the approval and approbation of others to maintain the needs of their ego. As long as you and I *work* for self-worth, we will never achieve it. Because we have exalted dignity and exalted worth as our inherent birthright, every human being should work *from* self-worth and not *for* it.

Let's wrap this section up on a positive note: the Principle of Humility is a truly powerful People First Principle! When we encounter someone who intentionally and authentically practices this principle by putting the other person first in thought, word, and deed, it makes that person feel so honored, respected, and appreciated!

So the next time you begin a conversation with someone, start practicing everything that you would like them to do for you in that conversation by doing that for them. Asking them non-intrusive questions about their family and ask them what they are excited about in their lives at this moment. Become genuinely interested in what they are interested in. Don't use the conversation as a vehicle to showcase your world and your interests. Deliberately practice keeping the conversation *all*

about the other person; if he or she asks questions about yourself, keep your answer brief (not terse, just brief) and quickly return all your attention back on them and *their* needs, their challenges, their dreams, and their frustrations. Keep your mind on how you can more effectively serve *them*, and you will find that this consistent, humble practice will serve you very well.

Humility is one of the main characteristics of a mature People First Leader. This is not *a* way for you to mature as a leader; it is *the* essential gateway to developing true People First Leadership mastery.

## 6. Principle of Grace

The fundamental behavior undergirding the Principle of Grace is giving people permission to be human. The Principle of Grace deals with how we



deal with the blunders, shortcomings, and failures in our own lives and the lives of others.

Grace is defined as unmerited and undeserved favor. Since every human being is finite and fallible, it is utterly impossible for any person to live a perfect life. If we are looking for either "perfection" or "nothing" in each other, we will always get nothing!



Human beings are complicated, hypersensitive, and extremely fragile. All personal and professional relationships are a moment-by-moment exercise in learning how to deal with each other's faults, inadvertent errors, and outright failures. The Principle of Grace, therefore, is one of the most profound relationship principles that a person can ever learn.

Grace-oriented relationships are the healthiest, because both

parties know that when either person offends the other, they will be gracious to one another ... even in the face of their worst failures. It is important to note here that this Principle of Grace in *no* way suggests that a People First

Leader will ignore or condone bad behavior. To the contrary, the Grace Principle acknowledges that even though a person may have lapsed into inappropriate behavior that requires correction, there is forgiveness available if that person is willing to acknowledge their bad behavior and take steps to correct their misguided actions.

This Principle of Grace is the most effective means for restoring the erosion of trust that takes place in every difficult relationship. If you only treat people according to what they *deserve*, your relationships will never experience the forgiveness, freedom, and care that a grace-oriented relationship affords.

One of the most powerful ways for people to improve the quality of their relationships is to grow in their graciousness toward one another. When people extend grace to one another, *both* people benefit; the offended person has seized on a wonderful opportunity to practice grace and

the offending person experiences what it is like to receive the grace that they desperately need and definitely do not deserve.

Without an understanding of the Principle of Grace, there is no logical premise for any relationship to survive. Even though we all possess exalted dignity, exalted worth, and sanctity of human spirit, we remain imperfect creatures until the day we die.

Our imperfections make us prone to commit every

kind of infraction imaginable. It has been well said that "We are all one step away from stepping into Stupid." Therefore, we must constantly maintain a gracious attitude toward one another. When we fail—and we all do—we need to extend grace to one another. We gently, lovingly, and patiently lift one another up

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The culture of grace constantly proclaims the old Chinese proverb, "Fall down seven times, get up eight!" And when we do fall, we see that someone is standing right beside us, offering a hand to help us back up!

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back to a place of living exemplary lives. There is nothing more transformative and liberating for an organization than to instruct everyone in the Principle of Grace.

When people know that they have permission to fail—that they are *not* expected to be perfect and that forgiveness and grace are available to them in an abundant supply—everyone is set free to learn from their mistakes, blunders, and failures. It logically follows, then, that without giving people the permission to fail we are not giving them permission to succeed!

The manager who does not operate on the Principle of Grace, but rather on the principles of perfectionism and legalism—i.e., the letter of the law—is unwittingly bringing out the *worst* in those they manage. Everyone under their high-control and command management style is always walking on eggshells, fearfully anticipating the hammer to drop



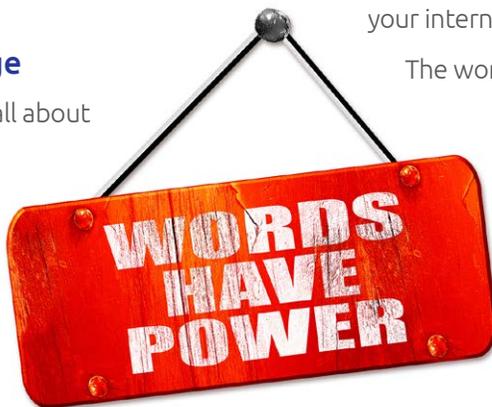
on their heads at any moment because they are not living up to the unrealistic perfectionism of their manager. No one looks forward to waking up in the morning and being around that joyless manager. It sucks the life out of people; it is a very frustrating existence! All perfectionist managers *must* stop pretending that they are perfect and freely admit that they too are “Under Construction” and are moment-by-moment candidates of grace ... just like everyone else.

On the other hand, the leader who operates on the Principle of Grace brings out the very best in everyone, because they have fully embraced the fallibility of their own humanity. Everyone knows that when they are around them that it is okay to be human. An organization that fully internalizes the Principle of Grace and begins to consistently practice this grace on a daily basis will completely drive out fear and frustration. It will open up the floodgates of celebration and true empowerment.

It is so tragic that most organizations know very little about the Principle of Grace! Without it, no organization can truly create a sustainable People First culture. The culture of grace constantly proclaims the old Chinese proverb, “Fall down seven times, get up eight!” And when we do fall, we see that someone is standing right beside us, offering a hand to help us back up!

## 7. Principle of Language

The Principle of Language is all about the power of our words and the profound impact that our words have on our relationships. There has been much written in both sacred and secular literature regarding the central role that the tongue plays in its ability to impart life or death. And because of the immense power that is carried in the words we use, it is of paramount importance that we carefully think about the choice of our words before we speak them.



Language and life are unalterably linked to one another in that our language is our life and our life is our language. Hence, the quality of our thoughts and the quality of our relationships is solely predicated on the quality of the words that we think and the quality of the words that we use to express our thoughts in our relationships. If our speech is characterized by loving, caring, and gracious words then we should expect to enjoy loving, caring, and gracious relationships. However, if our language is rude, inappropriate, and insensitive to the feelings of others, it will negatively impact the quality of our lives and our culture ... and, by extension, it will inevitably have a detrimental effect on the bottom line of our businesses.

Thus, the quality of the relationships that exist in every organization is based on the quality of the words that are exchanged in person-to-person conversations. Loving, caring organizations simply will not exist without loving and caring conversations. If no one in an organization ever says “I love you” or “I care about you” to one another, how can a culture of love and care exist? And, by way of social extension, if the people within an organization don’t feel loved or cared for, how are they possibly going to love and care for their customers? It is an incontrovertible fact that you can’t impart what you don’t possess. Consequently, whatever you want your external customers to feel, your internal customers *must* feel first!

The words that are used in an organization are not printed out in a corporate lexicon and handed to every new hire to learn as part of their onboarding process. The words that people use in an organization are not *taught* but *caught*. The words that characterize a culture are caught by hearing the words that the leaders use and observing their interactions.

It is rare that employees are told, “These are the words that we use in our organization.” People simply listen to how the leaders speak to them and to their coworkers and then begin mimicking the language of their leaders.



Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that *leadership is all about language*. If the leaders use intemperate, indelicate, and inflammatory speech, then the culture will reflect the language of its leadership. If the language of the leaders is characterized by the constant use of profanity, then every employee is given tacit permission to follow the example of their leaders. If leaders use critical, condemning, and condescending language, everyone begins to believe it is normal and acceptable to address one another in a disrespectful and dehumanizing manner.

On the other hand, if everyone observes that their leaders do *not* indulge in inappropriate speech, they will govern their own words accordingly. If leaders “speak the truth in love” when they correct their employees, using gentle words and not harsh language, everyone learns from their leaders’ example that dignified correction is accomplished by speaking the truth in loving, nurturing language. If the leaders use affirming, approving, and acknowledging words of edification then the culture learns that these are the words that our caring, disciplined leaders have chosen to use in order to differentiate their culture from every other culture. Thus the dignified and delicate language of leadership is one of the most powerful shapers and influencers of a healthy, life-giving People First culture.

It is critical that every leader recognizes that when they communicate with others that they are using three very specific channels of communication: **Verbal**—the actual words that a leader uses in their speech; **Non-verbal**—the body language that accompanies their words; and **Paraverbal**—that is, the tone of voice that is used to deliver their spoken words. Language experts have determined the role that each of these channels of communication plays in conveying a message to a listener. Here is the

percentage breakdown of how the total message is transmitted to the listener: 7% of the message is conveyed verbally, 55% is conveyed non-verbally, and 38% is transmitted through the paraverbal channel.

In other words, the language scientists are telling us that *93% of what we communicate to others has nothing to do with the actual words that we employ!* Therefore, leaders should make sure that all three channels in which they communicate are absolutely congruent. If they roll their eyes or heave a disapproving sigh while they are speaking, or if their tone of voice is harsh and overbearing, they may very well convey an entirely different meaning than what was expressed in their actual words.

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Consequently, whatever you want your external customers to feel, your internal customers *must* feel first!

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People First leaders intentionally think about all three communication channels before they begin to speak. They deliberately design their communication strategy so that there is no ambiguity created by what they say and how they say it with respect to their tone and body

language. They intentionally work to ensure that all three communication channels are positively aligned to deliver one clear, caring, and purposeful message.

It follows, then, that great cultures are built, one caring conversation at a time, by caring leaders who use caring words. And those caring words that leaders use form the basis for developing caring relationships, on both the personal and professional level.

If you want to enjoy better relationships with your loved ones, change your language and you will change your life! Begin thinking about the quality of your words and the influence and impact that your words are having on your family. Do you use loving, uplifting, encouraging, and inspiring words with your family? How often do you say things like ...

- I love you
- I believe in you
- I am proud of you
- I need you



- Thank you
- I value you
- I delight in your company
- I agree with you
- I respect you
- I love your heart and mind
- I trust you
- I appreciate you
- I admire you
- You bring out the best in me
- I love being around you
- You inspire me?

Our language is nothing more and nothing less than a clear display of our hearts. Hence, our language is the gateway to truly connect in a meaningful way to the hearts of others. When loving, caring, gracious, and gentle language characterizes the demeanor of every conversation in an organization, it will adorn its members with an incomparable and compelling attractiveness that will, by its example, boldly proclaim to the world, “We know how to address one another with dignity, respect and honor ... which is in harmony with the dignity, worth and sanctity of our humanity.”

What better way to attract customers to your culture, products, and services than by enriching the language of your employees, so that they in turn enrich the lives of others by means of their dignified and edifying language? Choose today to become known and admired as a loving, caring, and inspiring leader because of the language that you have deliberately chosen to use in all of your relationships!

## 8. Principle of Servanthood

The Principle of Servanthood is the logical outliving of the belief that every person possesses exalted dignity, exalted worth, and exalted potential.

The logical question should be this: Since every person possesses a sacred human spirit—with immeasurable, incalculable, and inestimable worth—how then should we treat one another?

The answer is that royalty should serve royalty. Because we are all royal members of the human race, we should honor one another by serving each other in excellence! When we meet each other, we should all think—because we are in the presence of royalty—“How may I serve you?”

This is often a counterintuitive concept, because many people regard the idea of being someone’s “servant” as tantamount to being inferior to them. When we think of servants waiting on us, we tend to think of them as people who have a lower status in life. Therefore, the connotation of “servant,” for many people, conveys the idea of an inferior, servile person.

However, that isn’t the proper context for this word. There is another context that is more suitable for our guiding Principle of Servanthood that will completely reframe and reform the meaning of “servant” back to its rightful and regal status.

Think of the president of the United States of America, whose office is looked upon as one of the most esteemed elected positions in our country. However, the preeminent purpose behind this lofty position is to be the greatest *servant* of the people of the United States of America. That is why the president is called a “public servant.”

A People First leader will wholeheartedly and enthusiastically embrace the Principle of Servanthood

# SERVANTHOOD



as one of the highest callings in life. The most ennobling character trait of servanthood is that the servant is a giver, not a taker. The heart of a servant is characterized by habitually sowing the seeds of self-sacrifice in order to reap a great harvest of good for others ... *and* for him/herself. The attitude of the servant isn't self-centered, self-serving, or self-occupied. Servanthood is the exemplary model of humility with skin on! There is nothing more attractive and appealing to the human spirit than to meet someone who willingly delights in serving them in

excellence, with no other agenda than to experience the pure joy and love of serving a fellow human being.

It is only when we become occupied with other people's interests that we find true freedom from being a prisoner of our own self-importance.

Our Creator hasn't designed us so that the grand pursuit of

our lives is self-aggrandizement. Thus, greatness is the very opposite of what has been portrayed by so many hubristic leaders.

Contrary to popular opinion, the greatest one among us is the humble servant leader. The most noteworthy people throughout human history are those exemplary figures who chose the high road of servanthood and personal sacrifice as the path to true fulfillment and joy in life.

Embrace servanthood and you will embrace one of the greatest life principles for your personal and professional development and maturity. Choose today to become a servant leader. There are people all around you who need you to lovingly serve them. Don't miss an opportunity to serve others; it will always serve you well!

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“No company will treat you better or train you better than we will. You will experience ongoing success in our organization. And we will always celebrate every one of your successes, no matter how small.”

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## 9. Principle of Accountability

The Accountability Principle is the single most important principle of all of the People First principles because it maintains the existence and vitality of the other nine principles. This Principle of Accountability has been vitally important to me over the course of my career, because the only way that I have grown is through other people in my personal and professional life holding me accountable for the consequences of my choices and actions.

Moreover, the majority of organizations that I have worked with during the last forty-five years have shown me that a lack of accountability plagues their organizations, from the front line straight up to the C-suite. This accountability gap is one of the major restraining forces

that has kept these organizations from tapping their full potential and achieving their desired business results.

In July 2014, Partners In Leadership released the results of their Workplace Accountability Study, which involved 40,000 participants from thousands of different organizations across America. This study was the largest and most comprehensive that had ever been conducted on the state of accountability in the workplace, and it fully validated my own practical experience. At the conclusion of the three-year study, Roger Connors, CEO of Partners In Leadership and the study's chief researcher, observed:

There's a crisis of accountability in organizations today, a crisis of epidemic proportions. When properly approached, accountability can



really be the low-hanging fruit for optimizing organizational performance and accelerating organizational change efforts.

Here are two eye-opening findings from the Workplace Accountability Study. A staggering 82% of survey participants admitted that they either try but fail to hold people accountable . . . or they avoid it altogether. Moreover, nearly 9 out of 10 of those surveyed said that improving their ability in this area ranked among their top three professional development needs.

After looking at these dismal statistics regarding accountability in the workplace, where should a leadership team begin to create a culture of accountability? They must begin with a new understanding of accountability.

If leaders are to help everyone in their organization willingly and joyfully create a culture of true, shared accountability, they must change people's minds with regard to the negative connotation that has been traditionally associated with the concept of accountability. In other words, leaders must reframe the definition of accountability so that it conveys all the positive benefits and untapped potential that lies dormant within the treasure chest of the Principle of Accountability.

Leaders always want to instill the growth idea of "Fall down seven times; get up eight," coupled with another People First Growth Principle of "Permission to succeed and permission to fail." Therefore, the leader's main job is to eliminate the fear of punishment that has been unalterably connected to the idea of accountability.

Many people see the word *accountability* in light of being "called on the carpet" for some failure—being blamed and shamed because they didn't live up to the unrealistic demands of their high-command, high-control boss. The real problem, therefore, isn't with the term *accountability* itself. The essence of the problem, which has led to a very unfortunate misunderstanding

of the power of personal accountability, lies with bad leaders who have used accountability as a tool to beat people up rather than build them up and unlock their untapped potential for exceptional performance.

All great performance begins with an understanding of personal accountability. However, great People First leaders don't couch the concept of accountability in punitive language that negatively asserts that "I will punish you if you don't do what I say." People First leaders talk about personal accountability in relation to a specific high standard of performance excellence, coupled with clear expectations concerning the results they believe a person can achieve with excellence. In addition, a discussion of accountability should include how leaders will reward purpose partners for their exceptional efforts and outstanding results.

The People First leader is quick to tell every purpose partner that "No company will treat you better or train you better than we will. You will experience ongoing success in our organization. And we will always celebrate every one of your successes, no matter how small." This is how every leader should express the Principle of Accountability to their purpose partners, so that everyone will wholeheartedly embrace the idea of accountability and willingly help their leaders create a culture of shared accountability.

Before I explain in greater depth the latent power and potential in the Principle of Accountability as the primary gateway for an organization to achieve

**WHAT  
PRINCIPLES  
DO YOU  
VALUE**





its loftiest goals, I must clear up a common misconception concerning the People First philosophy. There are people who actually believe that, once an organization becomes a People First certified company, no one will ever be fired in that organization and no one will be held accountable for the consequences of their bad decisions, bad attitudes, or bad behaviors. This is flat-out wrong; nothing could be further from the truth concerning what the People First philosophy teaches.

Many organizations that have been People First certified routinely correct their purpose partners' unacceptable behavior by speaking the truth in love to them. These organizations also terminate the employment of purpose partners who willfully go against their stated values, policies, and procedures. Nonetheless, when they terminate a purpose partner's employment, they always do so with the utmost dignity, respect, and honor—that is, in a People First manner.

The People First leader always reinforces the notion that purpose partners will be held accountable for the consequences of their results. However, in the midst of a clear message on personal accountability, the leader never injects fear into the minds of their purpose partners with regard to their expectations concerning the purpose partners' role and responsibility within the organization. The leader is very intentional with respect to conveying their positive expectations by constantly using encouraging and engaging feedback that unequivocally states how well purpose partners are doing, coupled with an understanding of what they need to work on in order to live up to their full potential.

Now, in light of the things that have been said about the People First Principle of Accountability, I would like to propose our definition of accountability.

## Responsibility

A duty or obligation upon one moral, or legal accountability in to behave correctly in respect or ability or authority to act or dec take decisions independently.

Accountability is defined by being answerable to those who have authority over others within the guidelines of an understood and agreed to organizational philosophy. A culture of accountability is developed and sustained by means of each person voluntarily taking complete responsibility for the consequences of their decisions, attitudes, and actions. And this is always done according to the definition of their role and function and the expectations of the results that their contributions should achieve for the growth of the entire organization.

After looking at our definition of accountability, you will notice that it includes the word responsibility. Do you think that the definition of *responsibility* would be similar to or significantly different from the definition of *accountability*? If you search the internet for differences between these two words, you will find a host of varying views on this subject. But when you limit your search to the current dictionaries, you will discover that these words are used interchangeably; in other words, *responsibility* is used as a synonym for *accountability* and vice-versa.

I believe the simplest way to understand the words *accountability* and *responsibility* is to break each word



*It is easy to dodge our responsibilities,  
but we cannot dodge the consequences  
of dodging our responsibility.*

— Sir Josiah Stamp

into the two fundamental elements that comprise the meaning of these words. Let's look first at the word *accountability* and separate the two words that signify its meaning: *account* and *ability*. When you apply the meaning of these words to a person, this signifies that the person has the ability to give an account. And when we examine the two semantic elements in the word *responsibility*, we see the words *response* and *ability*. Thus, in similar fashion to the meaning of accountability, the word responsibility signifies that a person has an ability to give a response. You can see why dictionaries use these two words as synonyms for one another, because both words are essentially saying the same thing. One word is focused on the idea of giving an account, and the other word is focused on giving a response. The two different words are simply two sides of the same semantic coin.

When you put all of this together with reference to developing a culture of accountability, these two words signify that a purpose partner has the ability to give an account and a response to someone for something. And the person in authority has the delegated power over the purpose partner to either reward or correct the purpose partner according to how well they have fulfilled the requirements of their role.

In light of what we've just discovered, when someone says that they take full responsibility for their actions, what are they actually saying? First of all, if they understand the full import of the meaning of the word *responsibility*, they are asserting that they are willing to give a detailed response for their decisions, attitudes, and actions to the person in authority over their specific role and function within the organization. Those actions may be misaligned

with the organization's accepted organizational standards of excellence. Secondly, they are stating that they are willing to completely accept any corrective action that would result from the consequences of their

unacceptable choices and actions.

Here is one of my favorite quotes on responsibility:

*It is easy to dodge our responsibilities, but  
we cannot dodge the consequences of  
dodging our responsibility.*

— Sir Josiah Stamp

Another important idea that is related to the Principle of Accountability is the concept of *ownership*. Everywhere I go, leaders are looking for ownership-minded people. Unfortunately, very few leaders have been told how to develop an ownership culture.

A culture of accountability *is* an ownership culture. When everyone in an organization voluntarily commits to being a responsible, accountable, and humble steward of the values, mission, and vision of the organization and commits to living out those ennobling tenets in their respective role and function as exemplars of the company philosophy, then each person becomes a caring co-owner of producing a sustainable competitive advantage for the organization.

A co-owner wants to be held accountable for their choices and actions. Why? Because these humble purpose partners know that they possess a human nature that is finite and fallible. Therefore, they willingly embrace the idea of the Accountability Principle as the quintessential gateway for their personal and professional growth and development. In other words, they know that they need wise, caring leaders to lovingly correct any decisions, attitudes, and actions that are inappropriate and misaligned with the values, mission, and vision of the organization. They recognize that if they are not answerable for their



behavior they will not grow to their full potential. They also realize that they have blind spots, so they actively seek out others who will act as their accountability partners to help them recognize the attitudes and behaviors that don't comport with the character that they wish to exemplify.

At this point, it is important to turn our attention to the person who is the greatest threat to creating an accountability culture: that individual bears the ignominious appellation of a hubristic person. A hubristic person has very little regard for authority; therefore, they are unwilling to be held accountable for the consequences of their actions. The guiding principle for their life is: "I am above correction; therefore, no one will tell me what to do!"

To the degree that the members of an organization are willing to hold one another accountable for any hubristic behaviors—to open up and be transparent with one another concerning their individual weaknesses and blind spots, and demonstrate a genuine desire to solicit one another's support to close those department gaps—to that same degree they will experience greater levels of mutual trust and respect, resulting in constant, continuous, shared growth and development. In other words, vulnerability and transparency are character *strengths*, whereas hubris and hypocrisy are glaring character *weaknesses*.

If hubris is left unchecked, it blinds a person to the consequences of their bad behavior. And that bad behavior will negatively impact the health of the culture. Hubristic people don't think in terms of the indissoluble construct of the choice-consequence connection. That is why it is of paramount importance to create a culture of shared accountability and ownership so that hubris has no place to take root and bear its noxious fruit of disempowering and disengaging consequences, which inevitably drains the life and potential out of every organization.

The hubristic person serves as an excellent living example of the business concept of a silo. The hubristic person's thoughts and actions are sustained by the abiding belief that he or she is self-sufficient, self-contained, self-satisfied, and in need of nothing.

That is also the mind-set of every silo. Hubristic people feel no need to be accountable to anyone for their actions because they believe that their actions represent the impeccable standards of excellence. Moreover, they believe that no one knows how well they are doing better than themselves. This faulty belief further underscores their complete disregard for authority and their recalcitrant attitude toward being held accountable—that is, answerable to anyone for the consequences of their choices.

The fatal flaw in this kind of thinking and character is that the hubristic person believes that his or her thinking and actions contain no imperfections. Hubristic people simply do not understand that we are all finite and fallible human beings, desperately needing each other to help us stay on a virtuous path. Every human being has the innate proclivity to stray from the righteous path of integrity every day of our lives. In other words, no one is immune from stepping into stupid.

Hubris will cost you more than you know, take you places that you don't want to go, turn you into a person that you don't want to be, and bring out a side of you that you don't want to see.

In closing this section on the Principle of Accountability, I would like to leave you with some provocative questions that will help you to think more deeply and meaningfully about the importance and necessity of creating a culture of accountability in your organization.

### Seven Questions to Facilitate the Creation of a Culture of Accountability

1. Have you developed a comprehensive accountability system where everyone in your organization has total clarity around their specific standards of performance and the expected results their role and function requires? In addition, does each person understand how they will be held accountable for the consequences of their choices and actions with regard to the results that they should achieve?

**Hint:** This kind of accountability system is much more meaningful and relevant than an annual





## 10. Principle of Growth



Everywhere we look in creation we see abounding evidence of this Growth Principle at work. All living organisms exist to reproduce and survive. Scientists call this Growth Principle the “biotic potential,” because all living creatures possess the inherent potential to perpetuate their species. Consequently, the very essence of created life is the manifestation of the biotic potential principle, which is manifested by the growth, development, and maturity of plants, trees, animals, and innumerable forms of life.

It follows that organizational leaders should become learned students of the life sciences so that they will more intentionally apply these Growth Principles in order to unlock and unleash the biotic potential that is latent within their team members.

One of the most important words that an organization should be focused on is *growth*, because the multidimensional success and sustainability of every business is solely predicated and dependent on its ability to grow, develop, and constantly change itself for the better. However, organizations don’t grow, develop or change; only individuals have the capacity and capability to grow, develop, and change themselves.

Hence, the Principle of Growth with regard to the development and maturity of every individual within an organization should be the driving force and governing principle behind every attitude and action of that organization. In other words, the growth mindset should become an integral aspect of every organization’s onboarding process. This educational new hire initiative will ensure that everyone thoroughly understands and commits to this maturation construct—namely, that if we are not habitually growing personally and professionally as a People

First culture, we are dying. And everyone suffers the consequences of an organization’s decline.

It logically follows that if everyone in your leadership team can’t answer the question “Why Grow?” they are not serving the organization well because they are not leading with a growth mindset. What does growth do for every organization? It creates new, productive, and profitable opportunities. Corporate growth is the quintessential gateway that opens the doors to business expansion and corporate sustainability. That is why every leadership team must have unanimity of thought and direction around the importance of constant, continuous improvement as a guiding principle for your innovation strategies. The maxim “Change before you have to change!” should be a driving force behind all leadership growth initiatives.

Continuing with the provocative leadership question “Why Grow?” every leader should unanimously assert that we have a concerted effort focused on our corporate growth, primarily because it makes good business sense. Every leader should be passionately and compellingly proclaiming that “We are in business to grow our business!” If you are not moving forward you are going backward. Lean forward or get out of the way!



However, at the same time, every leader should constantly remind themselves that primacy in business and in life is not all about the money. Financial gain in every business is simply a marker signaling that your customers find sufficient value in your products and services to invest their money in your organization. But a leader must never lose sight of the irrefutable fact that the monetary rewards you are experiencing are a direct outcome of your growth.

So what should be at the center and circumference of every conversation with regard to what is most important to your organization? The resounding answer is GROWTH—growth defined so that it includes both personal and professional growth. When you create a People First culture where everyone gets excited about their personal growth and begins to reap the inevitable professional rewards of their individual growth, you have created a magnet culture that shouts to the world, “Come grow with us, have fun with us, and enjoy a more enriching, more loving, and more joyful lifestyle!” If you can accomplish this, you will experience *explosive* growth, because people—especially millennials—intensely desire to live and work in a culture that is authentically concerned about their mental, physical, spiritual, social, financial, and emotional growth and well-being.

Therefore, once the leadership team of an organization fully grasps the power and potential of helping every individual grow personally and professionally as the sustainable, competitive advantage of their business, then—and only then—will they truly differentiate themselves from the herd of mediocrity.

Peter Baeklund perfectly captured the critical importance of an organization’s growth and development hinging on the growth and development of its people with this provocative quip:

**CFO asks CEO:** “What happens if we invest in developing our people and then they leave us?”

**CEO:** “What happens if we don’t ... and they stay?”

In the primary sense, the Growth Principle relates to the idea of a person willingly and passionately adopting all of the People First principles into their lifestyle so that they become a mature People First practitioner. It is important to note that the goal behind this growth and maturity principle is the manifestation of good character. People First character is a specific kind of character that is 100% worth modeling. A People First practitioner intentionally puts his or her good character on display for the whole world to see by means of their genuine and gentle care for others ... by the way they treat others with the utmost dignity, respect, and honor.

It is important to state a disclaimer here on People First character development. Just to be clear, the goal behind the Principle of Growth should not be merely growth for growth’s sake. The ultimate goal should be directed toward a most wise end state: growth in the knowledge of the truth. As we grow in our understanding of the importance and application of truth in all things, our character will reflect a moral compass and moral authority that will engender compelling confidence in each person as an authentic People First leader.

People First practitioners truly and authentically put other people first—seeking the well-being of others, first and foremost, in all their interpersonal interactions. Their deportment shouts to the world, “I put other people first!” It logically follows that the Growth Principle is the culmination of the nine People First principles that precede it. The People First philosophy reaches its highest and noblest form of expression when a person has matured in their understanding of its meaning and diligently applied all its principles to how they treat others.

People First practitioners do this so that they will pass on the People First philosophy to the next generation of leaders. In other words, the goal for all People First practitioners should not be that they become the sole beneficiaries of the philosophy, but that they will passionately pass it on to others in order to achieve a multigenerational perpetuity of this human betterment philosophy.



A word of caution is in order: no one will ever become a flawless exemplar of the People First philosophy. Everyone should put on their “Under Construction” T-shirt first thing in the morning as a constant reminder that we are all works in progress. That is why we added the Principle of Grace to our list of People First principles, because we will always make mistakes until the day we die and fall far short of perfection with regard to this philosophy. We must be gracious with ourselves and with others in the midst of our shortcomings and failures and not indulge in inordinate condemnation of others or any form of self-hatred. Again, always keep the encouraging maxim “Fall down seven times; get up eight” in view. Our mistakes should be seen as stepping stones to growth and development, not as impenetrable obstacles to growth.

True growth and development in the People First philosophy, as in the life sciences, is all about



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reproduction and duplication. Consequently, a person has reached maturity when they have modeled and mentored someone else in the People First principles and philosophy and prepared them to do the same.

In summary, the life sciences provide us with the perfect metaphor for this Growth Principle because they teach us how living organisms take root and bear fruit. Thus, all ten of the People First principles were logically developed and designed as an integrated system of thought, so that the People First philosophy will more intelligently and intentionally take root and bear fruit in a person’s life for their personal and professional betterment ... and ultimately for the betterment of others in this world. 

“My message to my Senior Team is that this has the potential to have the most transformational impact on our lives and our company that we will ever encounter, and will create a culture gap between MiTek and our nearest competitor that is so wide, it will be inconceivable to imagine them ever coming near to us culturally.”

**Thomas J. Manenti**  
Chairman and CEO

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