

GREAT LEADERS TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

I have seen time and again how the committed take responsibility for their actions. In our high-litigation culture, there's always someone else to blame. It can be easy to point the finger at suppliers, underlings, partners, and managers that just can't seem to get things right. I have yet to meet this mass of completely incompetent workers, which leads me to think we might be trying to steer some of the fault away from where it belongs—on ourselves. Deflecting blame is no way to build trust. Not only is owning up to our actions the right thing to do, but it can often overcome negative consequences. For an example, we needn't look any farther than former Navy sub commander Scott Waddle, whose ship collided with a Japanese fishing boat, killing nine civilians. Although an investigation determined that some of his men had made errors, Captain Waddle took responsibility for the incident. While he was reprimanded for the accident, he has been largely regarded as a hero for taking full responsibility for his actions and the actions of his crew, never once diverting any criticism to them.

Great leaders take responsibility. This lesson is hard for many to learn. Major League Baseball buried itself more deeply under a scandal surrounding the use of illegal steroids. As the media dug in its claws, an interesting trend emerged: The players who have been forthright with their wrongdoings have, by and large, been forgiven. In fact, a few have been praised for their integrity and candor. Imagine that a group of icons, shown to have broken the rules, are vindicated simply by coming clean. On the other hand, some players have been unwavering in their denials, even in the face of overwhelming evidence and testimony. Some may even face criminal and obstruction charges. While everyone has the right to clear his or her name if wrongly accused, being honest in the first place is the right thing to do.