

Hey, hey, let's talk about the difference between punishment and accountability. Let's go!

Hi, welcome to the podcast. I'm Kris Plachy, thank you for joining me on Leadership is Feminine. Let's talk about it. This is a good one for the Leadership is Feminine audience. I want to talk to you about...Overall, I want to talk to you about accountability, but I think we need to sort of pull apart the difference between punishment and accountability.

If I were going to pick the number one thing that people struggle with that I work with, that people talk to me about, like bump into him on the street, we just randomly started talking about performance of employees, right? One of the most common things is: "Oh, it's just so frustrating, it's so hard to get people to do what I want and then I have to hold them accountable and it's so uncomfortable," all the things, right?

And so, it gets me kind of thinking like—and even about myself, because I don't really love it either. None of us do. I've just had to learn how to get better at it. And I'm still not an expert. I still have work to do. I think we all do. But I do know that, I think one of the reasons why it's so hard to wrap our heads around holding people accountable, addressing poor performance, addressing issues with performance, is because we associate accountability with punishment.

And I think this is really born out of the very traditional masculine leadership models that we have been raised on, that there is a power authority figure who inflicts penalty as a form of retribution for an offense. That's what the Google says. A further example is rough treatment or handling inflicted on or suffered by a person. A broader definition is "punishment is commonly the imposition of an undesirable or unpleasant outcome upon a group or individual, meted out by an authority."

I think because of the environment—and just look at social laws, the ultimate in accountability if you commit a crime is a punishment, it's going to jail. It's other things. And it's a form of accountability, punishment, is a form of putting people to the point of accounting for what they've done. But it isn't relevant at work. I don't know that it's relevant anywhere, but that's a whole other conversation.

Accountability has a very different contextual meaning when you look at what that means. So, the Google say that accountability is the factor condition of being accountable or responsible. It's understanding that you have ownership, that you have an obligation, that you are involved in the outcome, somehow, yeah, that you have taken responsibility for something.

So, when we think about what we have to do at work, our job as women who lead our own businesses is not to punish people, because they don't do their job well, or if they don't do their job well. I have no interest in that. I'm not interested in punishing anybody. But because we're so emotionally connected to the results of our team and in our business, right? It's our company, we created it, we feel very, very personally connected.

When we don't get the results that we asked for, and whether we've done that well or not—something else we can talk about on another call, or excuse me, another podcast. But your role as a leader of this business that you've created is to get work done through others, and to build that team and develop that team so that the business is more successful, and isn't as dependent upon you, right?

But what happens is when people don't do the things they said they would do, or people do a poor job of the things that they're expected to do in their role. Because most people—and I'm generalizing, but there's a truth here—most people haven't developed a lot of emotional acumen. They don't understand their emotions. They don't understand where emotion comes from. They just believe that other people's behavior triggers how they feel. They don't understand that they have way more emotional maturity available to them.

Because that's true, then when somebody makes a mistake or doesn't do what you want at work or doesn't meet an expectation or doesn't follow through, you can be incredibly emotionally triggered. And then from that place of emotional trigger, you react. And that reaction can feel and be like punishment. And that's not the goal of accountability. And I know this to be true of myself, I can always tell when I'm practicing clean accountability and dirty accountability.

Dirty accountability is when I'm keyed up and I'm trying to change your behavior because I'm upset. And I'm not immune to that. I don't think anybody is, but I do believe we get better at it. We get better at recognizing that, okay, I'm just trying to be retaliatory right now. You didn't do

what I asked, so now I'm going to punish you. And that's why so many of us avoid it altogether, because we don't know how to sit in the space of accountability. And what accountability is, honestly, the way I break that down, the way I teach it is, it's my job to account for your ability. It is not my job to punish you. It's really just to account for your ability. And if you don't have the ability, then you won't work here at that's not personal. I can love you to pieces. But we hire people, we make an exchange; I will pay you money, and you will deliver a result. If that's not happening, why do you work here? Why do I pay you? I don't have to punish you.

And I don't have to go through all this emotional turmoil to get there, even though that's easier said than done, and I respect that. That's so much of what we do in the "How to CEO" program, is help you learn how to navigate that because most of the women listening to this call, have people on their teams that they've worked with for a long time. These are people that you are loyal to, that you have a relationship with, that you know their kids. And so, then all of a sudden, their performance starts to not go well and you feel like "the great punisher" and you don't want to be that person, because you love them, so then you avoid it. And then what happens because you avoid it? You bury it and you get madder and madder and madder and madder and then the punisher shows up, right? Maybe that's not true for all of you. Some of you just overly people-please.

But nonetheless, punishment is irrelevant at work. It doesn't belong at work. It shouldn't ever be at work ever. Accountability should be at work every day. Accountability is you to me, "Hey, will you meet this goal?" "Yes." "Great." That's a commitment. There's accountability to that. "Hey, will you do this and make sure there's no errors?" "Yes." And I say yes and you say yes, and now we have an agreement, that's accountability.

Accountability is a professional agreement between professionals. It isn't personal. If you don't do it, I love you, but this is not going to work out, period. But when you make it mean more than that, I'm punishing them, I'm hurting them. I have so many women who start with me, and they're like, "If I hold this person accountable and they don't work for me anymore, their lives are going to fall apart and they're going to have..." All right, they tell this very, very dramatic story.

But the truth really is, let's just sit with this for a minute. You all know that you've had team members come into your world who have not been held accountable by anybody else. How do we know that? Because they come into your world. And you're like, "Wait a minute, isn't this common sense, that you would do what you said you would do, whatever?" But it's so rare, because so many people in leadership positions are so uncomfortable with holding people accountable that they don't. And so, we have people all over, all ages, who have not been held to account for their ability.

And so, what I say a lot is I feel like people stumble into my world sometimes and work for me and my team, and I try to give as much grace as I can. I really do. I probably overdo that. But then, I do like to hold people accountable. Like, if you're not going to do what we asked you to do, that doesn't make you a bad person, it's just not a good fit. But because people are so unused to being held accountable, then what they do is they villainize you; you're the problem, you're the one to blame, you're doing it wrong, you're the punisher, you're mean.

Now, if you add the fact that you were punishy and mean, that complements that. But even if you're incredibly graceful, it tends to still work out that some people think maybe it's your fault. And you have to be willing to go through that, my love, my wonderful, wonderful entrepreneur. We have to be able to sit with knowing that there will be people who work for you who will end up thinking poorly of you, simply because you just held them to an expectation, because it's just easier to be mad at you, right, than to look at the fact that they let themselves down and they didn't keep their word. And that's way more human behavior than we're going to talk about on this podcast. But it's a truth that you have to tell. And even if that's true, I want you to still go forward. But let's hold people accountable. Let's have honest conversations, let's set really clear expectations, let's hold them to the commitments that you agree on mutually, and then we address it, if it's not properly handled.

And in "How to CEO," I teach you how to do all of this and you bring it to a call, and we talk about it and we roleplay it and we laugh about it. And then sometimes we cry, like, "This is terrible. Why do I have to do this? Why is this person constantly making me have to tell them they're not doing a good job? Why?" I don't know the answer to that. All I know is that will be a

part of what you do as somebody who manages a business. And it doesn't matter who it is, there will always be...Like, people will shock you.

The faster you can know like, "Okay, wait a minute, what is my role here? What do I need to take responsibility for? What is my place? How do I want to show up emotionally here? I am not a punisher, I am holding them accountable. That is my job. And if holding them accountable ultimately means they don't stay here, that doesn't mean I'm a horrible human, and it doesn't mean I'm punishing them. It means that they earned their way out."

Just like some people earn their way up and earn themselves a raise and earn themselves praise and earn themselves opportunity, there are other people who earn themselves out the door through their poor results. And that is your role as their leader is to make sure that's always very clear and neutral, not personal.

But when you get into punishment, right, you ignore people, you avoid people, you're short with people, you're dismissive of people, you give people more work because you know it'll make them fail. You insult them, you condescend to them, you're punishing them because they didn't meet a goal, they didn't meet your expectation. That's not okay. The same thing is true of a team member who does that to you; team members who ignore you, team members who don't talk to you, team members who avoid you, no, it's just emotionally immature.

So, what we do instead is you and I, or if it's not me, and this is a challenge for you, you need a coach, you've got to get somebody who's going to help you work through this, because this will limit your ability to grow as a business, I can promise you that. When you least expect it, someone is going to show up and not meet expectations and you'll be like, "Wait, wait a minute, what's happening? Why?"

And you have to be able to navigate that moment as emotionally mature as you can. And you have to recognize that addressing their lack of ability to, or lack of consistency in meeting expectations, does not warrant punishment, it warrants accountability. Punishment is for power. And typically, I mean, in my mind, it has an ugliness to it, and it can be arbitrary and it can certainly be very emotional and reactive.

Punishment is about forcing change in another person. Accountability is about addressing a commitment and agreement, whether it was met or not. It has nothing to do with the other person needs to be different. They just need to decide, “Look, if you want to come and be here, I’d love you to be here, but if you’re going to continue to not meet expectations, that’s cool, but you won’t do it here. Because we make agreements, and my expectation is when you work here, you keep your agreement. That’s all. It’s not personal.”

So, sit with that, just let that sink into you for a little bit, and really ask yourself: holding people accountable, addressing performance, do I make it about punishment? Do I believe that if I write them up, I’m punishing them? Do I believe if I fire them, I’m punishing them? Or do I want to choose instead that people earn their way up, people earn their way to more money, people earn their way out, and the way that that happens is through a series of agreements that we make, and I have as much responsibility in that as they do in my expectations, my follow through, my commitment to them as their commitment to the business and their follow through.

Sit with that, explore it, I think it’s worth it. Because I think when you can get through this, even though it’s still hard when somebody that you have enjoyed working with, or a brand-new person that you’re like, “This person is so great,” and then they’re not great, whatever it is. I know how disheartening that is, especially if you’re a small business, and there’s not a lot of you there. I appreciate how you take that personally; I really do. I would love to be able to tell you that will just go away someday. I don’t really—at least for me, it doesn’t, I just get a little better at it. I’ve just gotten a little quicker at it. And that’s what I would like for you too, so give it some thought.

As always, you can email us hello@krisplachy.com and let us know what you’re thinking. And if you enjoy this podcast and listen regularly and you haven’t written a review on iTunes, we’d love it if you would today. Would you do that? Just go right to iTunes and go right there and write a review, hit five stars. Do it. All right, lovely, have a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful day. I’ll talk to you next time.