

The Leader's Achilles' Heel

COVER | STORY

How To Avoid The Fatal Wounds Of Unaccountability

Award-winning international leadership & human dynamics expert - **Kendall C. Wright**, reveals key insights to assist leaders in engaging the imaginations and leveraging the full initiative of today's workforce.



Every leader has his or her own unique combination of skills, aptitude, and knowledge. Some differentiate themselves in casting compelling visions, while others brilliantly build strategic plans of implementation. Some leaders are exceptionally skilled in soliciting the initiative and follow-through of those in their direct report. And yet others are adept in forging alliances and partnerships. Clearly, individual strengths, skills, and “sweet spots” abound.

Irrespective of all those strengths and sweet spots, what we know for a surety is that every leader has an Achilles' heel. Amazingly, there is one particular dexterity in leadership that defies the laws of random distribution. There is one skill that frequently, and predictably, resides atop the list of leadership deficiencies. In fact, the wider the sample, the more prominent its placement. This specific skill is, indeed, the Achilles' heel for an overwhelming majority of leaders today.



According to Greek mythology, Achilles was born to proud parents; Peleus (father) and Thetis (mother). As the legend has it, a clairvoyant forewarned Thetis that her infant son's longevity was questionable. Achilles was to die in war. In an ostensibly desperate act, Thetis feed Achilles an ambrosia (the "food of the gods"), then sought to transform him into a pseudo-immortal by completely submerging him in the waters of the Styx River. Consequently, Achilles' body became impervious to mortal injury. That is, everywhere except his calcaneal tendon, which is where his mother gripped him as she plunged him into the river. Years later, Achilles' calcaneal tendon proved to be his only point of vulnerability, and ultimately it was the location of a lethal injury. This is why, today, we refer to a weakness or point of vulnerability as one's Achilles' heel.

Corporately, as well as individually, the Achilles heel of leadership is, and has been, the act and the art of holding others accountable. The striking results of extensive surveys and research readily establish this point of fact. Moreover, your own personal experiences serve to corroborate the veracity of the challenge. This glaring point of vulnerability easily undermines the leader's extraordinary efforts and accomplishments in other areas. When leaders opt not to hold others accountable, the very foundation of team work is washed away like a sand castle at high tide. Once the foundation becomes unsound, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to build anything of any great magnitude or significance. The direct and indirect costs of ineffectiveness in this arena are practically incalculable – and incomprehensible.

No leader ever wants to have his or her Achilles' heel exposed or exploited. But it takes more than merely hoping to prevent the hobbling of your leadership effectiveness. Education and training are required to fortify your accountability skills and thereby shielding and strengthening your Achilles' heel. Here are four principles to assist you in achieving that goal:

Know Why You Want To Say It. Having a crystal clear "why" is a compelling motivator. It is vitally important to be explicitly clear on why the specific behavior mandates a conversation. This clarity must be obtained before engaging in an accountability conversation.

Know How You Want To Say It. Plan out your conversation to cover the essential components of an accountability conversation; emphasizing the inappropriate behavior, it results, and the expected new behavior.

Know When You Want To Say It. Bear in mind that feedback is most effective when delivered in close proximity to the occurrence in question. Allowing too much time to transpire between the event and the accountability conversation only adds to miscommunication and

misgivings.

Know Where You Want To Say It. Make privacy a priority. It can be challenging enough to be on the receiving end of an accountability message, without also having to contend with the dynamics of embarrassment or humiliation.



Achilles was impervious to the swords and arrows of his enemies, so long as they didn't assault his weak spot. Adhering to the four basic principles presented here will help your safeguard against the daggers and darts that always accompany unaccountability. Not only will these principles aid you, they will transform your team's dynamic as well.

Actualizing Leadership Lesson: Achilles' heel is an excellent metaphor for the timidity and futility of leaders in regard to holding others accountable in the work place. While many leaders excel in the majority of their responsibilities, the same cannot be said when it comes to holding others accountable. This ineffectiveness, if not rectified, will remain a point of vulnerability for both the leader and the team.

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Kendall C. Wright, "The Actualizer," CEO of Entelechy T&D, Inc., helps business leaders -at all levels- fulfill the human parts of their job descriptions. He has spoken in 49 of the 50 US States, 20 countries and 5 continents. He is the author of *Affirming and Confirming SuccessFUL Living*, and *Conversations on Success*, featuring insights from Les Brown, James Kouzes and other top tier international speakers. And the forthcoming *Leadership Lessons From Motown's #1 Hits*.

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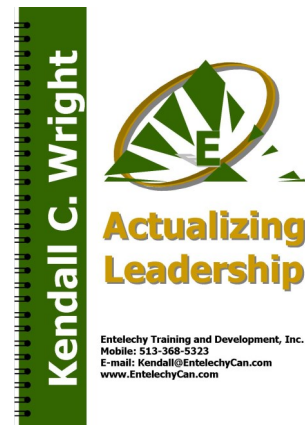
Implementation Zone

My immediate take-aways

Start:

Continue:

Stop:



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