

QBQ! QUICKNOTES

messages of accountability

Five Fabulous QBQ! QuickNotes

A note on how to best use these QBQ! QuickNotes:

Each of these five [QBQ! QuickNotes](#) contain inspiring content on *personal accountability*. Do not read them all at once. After enjoying one, ask *The Question Behind the Question (QBQ)*—"How can I apply this message in my life?"—and put it into practice. Then, the next day, read another and ask the same life-changing question!

Meanwhile, stop by [QBQ.com](#) and spend some time with us. Thank you for believing in QBQ!

John G. Miller
Author of [these books](#)
Info@QBQ.com
[About QBQ!](#)
Download the [QBQ! App](#)
Denver, Colorado USA

QBQ! QuickNote #1: *Take the QBQ! Challenge*

by John G. Miller

Does my organization have an accountability problem? The best way to answer this outstanding question is to take ***The QBQ! Challenge***.

At my organization ...

- When mistakes are made, do people ask, "Who dropped the ball?"
- When change happens, do people ask, "Why do we have to go through all this change?"
- When others don't follow through, do people ask, "When will that department do its job right?"
- When there is much to do, do people ask, "Why don't others pull their own weight?"
- When the team is struggling, do managers ask, "Why aren't my people motivated?"
- When resources are tight, do people ask, "When will we get more tools?"
- When the job is difficult, do people ask, "Who's going to train me?"
- When competitors surpass us in technology, do people ask, "Why don't we have better systems?"
- When communication suffers, do people ask, "Why don't they communicate better?"
- When recruiting, do managers ask, "When are we going to find better people?"

Now, since this isn't a science, I would just say if you answered YES to even a few of these questions, there is most likely a need for making personal accountability a core value. But what does that mean?

People speak often about organizational "culture." A working definition of this well-worn term might be: *Shared values and acceptable norms of behavior*. It's the way we as individuals—collectively comprising the organization—think, feel, and act. Culture is about how we treat each other, respond to each other, and support each other—or *how we don't*. It's characterized by behaviors that are allowed and considered normal and those that aren't.

If we pass *The QBQ! Challenge* above, then we've already made [Personal Accountability](#) (PA) a cultural core value. This means we've embraced PA as an idea or principle to the extent that we utilize it to shape our behavior and thinking.

Organizations that pass *The QBQ! Challenge* are [outstanding](#) because they're made up of individuals who have decided to exhibit accountability in all they do. People working together as teams, departments, branch offices, districts, and organizations have consciously committed to the essential discipline of accountability. Said differently, during those precious times they interact with colleagues, staff, and superiors, as well as the paying customers—we call them *moments*—they think and act *accountably*. When the ball is dropped, a peer commits an error, a random event blocks a goal, miscommunication takes place, or change happens, accountable people pause in the moment and ask *The Question Behind the Question* (QBQ), "What can I do to contribute?" and "How can I make a difference?"

If your culture is like this, I say *outstanding!* When we each choose to ask questions like the two above—over time—we create a culture where personal accountability is valued, honored, and practiced.

That is when **personal accountability** has become a core value.

However, organizations that fail *The QBQ! Challenge* have a culture characterized by Blame, Victim Thinking, Entitlement, Complaining, and Procrastination—but probably don't even know it. And that lack of awareness is a costly problem. But unawareness can be penetrated simply by taking *The QBQ! Challenge*.

So bring *The QBQ! Challenge* to your team. Work through it and decide where your organization stands. Don't worry if your organizational culture fails today. That's okay, there's always tomorrow.

With the right [tools and training](#)—and time—any organization can make personal accountability a core value!

QBQ! QuickNote #2: *Be a Blame Buster!*

by John G. Miller

I suppose we all have a phrase or two that we can't stand hearing. Here's one for me:

There's plenty of blame to go around!

Often spoken by someone in the media, it's a phrase that has become prevalent. Possibly because *blame has become popular!*

- [Parents](#) blame the schools, churches and Hollywood for how their kids turn out.
- Spouses blame each other (sometimes with their attorneys present).
- Employers blame the employees.
- Workers blame management.
- Voters blame the politicians they elected.
- Politicians blame ... their predecessors.
- Coaches and players blame the officials.
- Manufacturing blames R&D who blames HR who blames Marketing who blames Sales who blames ... *the customer!*

And everyone blames the economy. Why not, it's so easy!

In our DVD-based [QBQ! training program](#), I list some costs of blame in a work context.

Blame:

- Indicts people
- Destroys morale
- Reduces creativity
- Lowers productivity
- Increases fear
- Drives wedges between colleagues
- Breaks down teams

Blame also hurts us at home, not to mention in our communities, churches, and schools. You see, at the very least, when pointing fingers, we're not using our time, energy and creativity to solve a problem. And *all* organizations have problems! And since schools, families, nonprofits, government agencies, and businesses are all "organizations," there are problems everywhere! Remember this:

Nothing gets fixed when we are fixated on who's at fault.

The truth is, [outstanding organizations](#) do not "seek culprits." When there is a *Culture of Culprit Catching*, we actually create more problems than existed in the first place. If you don't believe me, see costs of blame listed above.

As we say in [QBQ!](#), [leaders](#) at all levels (that's you and me!) blame nobody—*not even themselves*.

That last statement is not a way of escaping blame. Since everyone commits errors, it simply means that if it's *me* that committed one, I don't have to beat myself up over it. The right questions to ask are, "What can I *learn* from this experience?" and "How can I now work to *solve* the problem?" Of course, it might mean having to say the words "I'm sorry!" to someone you know, too.

Blame-busting questions like these—we call them QBQs—put me on the path of **personal accountability** and that path is always the place to walk. And no matter who caused a problem, QBQs always bust the blame.

Our society may constantly send the message that "there's plenty of blame to go around," but we can resist the temptation to do what's popular, trendy—and incredibly immature. Instead, each of us can rise above the urge to blame; each of us can be a Blame Buster. And when that happens, our organizations can be [Outstanding!](#)

QBQ! QuickNote #3: *I Am Not a Victim!*

by John G. Miller

Kevin Brown, Director of Marketing for SERVPRO in Nashville, TN—a [QBQ!](#) believer and Miller friend— makes me think when he says, “Life is fair ... bad things happen to *all* of us.”

How often, though, do we think life is *not* fair? Ever made statements like these?

- The bank got us a "no interest" mortgage we now can't afford. *It's not fair.*
- My [kids](#) don't ever listen to me. *It's not fair.*
- My retirement account is way down. *It's not fair.*
- I didn't get the promotion/I lost my job/I was denied a raise. *It's not fair.*
- Others don't work as hard as I do. *It's not fair.*
- My boss doesn't communicate, coach, or seem to care. *It's not fair.*
- My employer cut our benefits. *It's not fair.*
- My staff doesn't seem to get what we're trying to do here. *It's not fair.*
- I'm buried in high interest credit card debt. *It's not fair.*
- My home is worth less than I owe on it. *It's not fair.*
- The neighbors have a new boat/car/pool and we don't. *It's not fair.*
- My co-workers are difficult to work with. *It's not fair.*
- Professional athletes make more than teachers. *It's not fair.*
- We're going through a ton of change at work. *It's not fair!!!*

My wife, Karen, has a favorite phrase. “It just is,” she’ll say. Meaning, sometimes stuff just happens, circumstances just exist, and people simply act like people. The truth is we were never promised “fairness.” Humans make hurtful comments, accidents occur, events take a turn we don’t expect, others are blessed with talents we lack, things happen out of our control—sometimes *way* out of our control.

Childhood friend, Philip Foltman, and I were both born May 28, 1958. I, though, am three hours older and never let him forget it.

Growing up in Ithaca, N.Y., we graduated from Ithaca High in 1976, were pals during our college years, and he served as my “best man” in 1980. And that he is: the best.

But in comparison to Phil, *I am a victim!* I have “the right” to be angry, hurt, and bitter. *It's not fair!*

How come? Because for over 35 years Philip has had something that I have not:

A mom.

In fact, he *still* has his mom. I can barely remember mine.

I've not had a mother since Gerald Ford was President, the Bee Gees were hot, and Star Wars was only in George Lucas' imagination. It was May 20, 1975, while attending a "ladies' meeting," Mary Miller, age 51, experienced a blinding headache, slumped on a friend's sofa, and was rushed to the hospital. Two hours later she was gone. A quiet but deadly killer had taken her. "Aneurysm" is a word I wished I'd never learned, and certainly not at 16.

It wasn't fair.

But Philip, my buddy, was there that tragic day in 1975. Within an hour he was at my house and five days later he and *his* mom—"Mrs. F"—came to *my* mom's memorial service.

Three and a half decades later, he still has his mom. Phil is a fortunate man.

But so am I, as I have many blessings ...

Karen is still my best friend, there are seven special people born between 1983 and 1998 who call me "Dad," beautiful grandchildren, and I love what I do.

And just as I certainly would *never* hold it against Philip for still having his mom, I shouldn't hold it against anyone for having more of anything than I do. Envy doesn't wear well. Neither does the *It's not fair! We're all victims!* mentality that pervades our society today.

Now here's what's not fair:

**Begrudging people their achievements, success, possessions,
financial status, and good fortune.**

When I hold it against others that they have more of *anything* than I do, *I have chosen to be a victim*. And victim thinking, self-pity, and envy eat away at my soul, destroy my ability to contribute, and make me a lesser person. Maybe even a small person.

Bottom-line, when I play victim, I serve nobody—*not even myself*. It's far better to [flip the switch](#) and completely eliminate victim thinking from my life.

Kevin Brown is right: Bad things happen to all of us. Sometimes those bad things are tragedies beyond our control and sometimes they're the result of our own mistakes. Either way, the secret to life success is in how I respond, the choices I make, and how I talk to myself.

And I—like you—will engage in healthy, productive, and truth-based self-talk saying:

- Success and happiness are based on choice not chance.
- My decisions have directed me to my destination.
- I am [personally accountable](#) for every choice I make.
- I am not a victim!

Thoughts like these enable each of us to [be outstanding](#). It's just as simple as that!

QBQ! QuickNote #4: *Ending the Blame Begins with ... Me!*

[by Kristin E. Lindeen](#)

Have you ever made a mistake? Dropped the ball? Caused a problem? I have. And I hate it when that happens.

Before joining QBQ, Inc., I served as a university academic advisor helping incoming students choose their classes. Jessica, a co-worker, and I counseled one new student, who was hesitant about attending college. She was a single mom with two little ones, and she worked a full time job. The three of us worked closely to set a schedule that worked for her. But on the first day of school, it turned out that she'd been put in the wrong class—wrong subject, wrong time, wrong location. This was bad news for an incoming student, especially a busy mom.

Well, we all huddled and after some creative scheduling, the problem was solved. The student—our customer, *my* customer—was happy.

So, feeling *personally accountable*, I spent some time thinking back over the circumstances to see if I could figure out where the mistake occurred. I tried to ask all the right questions of myself—I mean, after all, I was *raised* on QBQ!

“What could I have done to clarify?”

“How could I have followed up more effectively?”

“What can I do to be more careful in the future?”

Later, I wandered into Jessica's office and started talking about the whole mess. But while I talked, Jessica was only ... nodding! My frustration began to build. You see, to be truthful, I was accepting *my* responsibility for the problem, and rightly so. Yet, what I really, *really* wanted my co-worker to say was, “Well, Kristin, *I* could have done more, too.” When it got right down to it, I would've happily agreed to take, say, 70% of the blame, and then *she* could've taken 30%. In fact, I would've negotiated to 80/20 if she'd wanted to. I just needed her to say, *I am accountable, too!*

Has this ever happened to you? You're asking the right questions, admitting to your involvement in a problem, practicing personal accountability, but **no one else** is owning up to their part?! It's not an easy position to be in.

Honestly, as I was telling her, “I could have done this or that differently...” I wanted to scream out, *“And you, Jessica, could have done something differently and it'd be really*

super for you to admit it!!" What's ironic, is this coworker even had the QBQ! book sitting on her desk.

That was the day I realized that practicing personal accountability by using *The Question Behind the Question* is a choice—my choice—and not one that I can force others to make.

Personal accountability is just that—personal.

I can't make someone else be accountable. In her office, I suppose I could've asked Jessica to read the QBQ! book again, but that probably would not have enhanced our working relationship. Personal accountability is just that: *personal*. My job is to eliminate blame from *my life*.

Since I became a QBQ, Inc. team member and began [speaking](#) and conducting workshops on my dad's (John Miller) material, I have learned that organizations struggle mightily with this blame thing—what it looks like, why it happens, what its costs are, and how to stop it. There's even a bit of confusion about blame. Some recent client statements:

- Our executives actually like to ask "Who dropped the ball?" because they feel it keeps individuals from hiding behind systems and processes.
- So what if blame creates fear? What's wrong with that; isn't fear a motivator?
- As a [manager](#), why shouldn't I blame my staff? They're the ones not reaching their goals!
- OK, I know I shouldn't blame others, but does that mean I should take *all* the blame *all* the time?

I believe in simple, so let me simply quote the QBQ! book:

Accountable people don't blame anyone. Not even themselves.

It's true, solving problems, excelling in our work, building relationships, and reaching goals are all driven by introspection, humility, continuous learning, passion, accountability, and hard work. Never finger-pointing, accusing, recriminating, and blaming. Let's call it quits on The Blame Game today. We can do better. Are you with me 100%?

If not, that's okay—it begins with me.

QBQ! QuickNote #5: *Six Truths of Accountability*

by John G. Miller

I've been speaking on or writing about personal accountability since 1995—and I've come to believe there are six truths that are self-evident:

1. Everybody wants *everybody else* to practice personal accountability. Enough said.
2. Individuals make *exceptions for themselves* when it comes to accountability/responsibility/[ownership](#):
Example: If I earned an annual income of, say, \$65,000 back when the real estate market was peaking, but bought a half million dollar home—and then lost that home—it was due to "predatory lending." But if a neighbor flies to Vegas, gambles away his entire net worth and comes back broke, we think, "Wow. That was really stupid. What a foolish thing for him to do!"
Sometimes, we need to say that to ourselves, and then ask *The Question Behind the Question (QBQ)*, "What can I learn from this experience?"
3. I am *more effective* in all roles—father, mother, professional, spouse, friend, volunteer—when I practice personal accountability.
4. Personal accountability begins at home with [effective parenting](#).
5. Life is more *enjoyable*—downright more fun!—when I walk on the *High Road of Personal Accountability*.
6. It's simply the "right thing to do." The wrong things to do are blame, whine, point fingers, play victim, become entitled—and expect others to bail me out of my bad choices.

Now, if you don't agree with these six ideas—that's just fine. But that's the way I see it.

QBQ, Inc.

Denver, Colorado, USA

303-286-9900

Info@QBQ.com

QBQ.com

OutstandingOrganization.com