

# Mentoring Module

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## ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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**I believe that there are 3 key responsibilities essential for the successful entrepreneur and business owner.**

**The first key responsibility** is to have a worthwhile passion and to chase after it successfully. Of course, due to the very nature of such a definition it is strongly argued that this is being irresponsible. Rather it is much more responsible to ensure we have a pension to provide for us. It is of course being responsible to arrange a pension, but it is also incumbent upon us to chase our passion. Indeed, it is our greatest responsibility; if we cannot be responsible to our selves, how can we be responsible to others?

*We may not be always responsible for the responsibilities of others, but we are always responsible for whether we ultimately succeed or fail. In business terms chasing our passion will take care of our success while securing our pension into the bargain. And chasing it involves being accountable, though with a solution-focused mind-set, rather than a blame-focused mind-set. Too often the business world is focused on finding out who is to blame for problems. This is why there is reluctance to take ownership or be accountable as such action may risk the pension.*

**The second key responsibility** for any entrepreneur or business owner is to make a profit. It is not to incur a loss. CEO's that receive massive golden departure bonuses, after causing their company to crash, merely have been excellent contract negotiators ensuring a profit for themselves first before the company. Without profit you cannot grow your business, or invest in future passions.

Without profit you cannot do any of the things that you want to do. Without profit you get by until you slowly die.

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**And the third key responsibility** is to determine, define and then defend to the end their role as the driving force of a business or venture.

I have always been amazed, because surely it is fundamental to actually doing something, at how individuals are unclear about their role and responsibilities, both at the commencement and implementation. Almost always the termination of a position is because the role had not been fulfilled as expected.

Clearly, it is important that people understand what it is they have to do and what is expected of them. It is bizarre that intelligent people who are supposed to have a sense of personal responsibility neither have role clarity and nor are they able to clarify what is expected of others.

**What is of vital importance** is getting the right people in the right role with the right understanding at the outset, but it is a two way street.

If a new employee starts a new position and is unclear of their function then they must ask for a detailed clarification. Such clarification must be provided at the beginning. If it is not immediately forthcoming, then the incoming employee must take it that it will probably not be forthcoming and instead prepare a detailed brief on their own and ensure that all appropriate persons are made aware of it. Performing a role on the basis of 'let's see how it goes' is not a good way to start. This is the route of false promises, misguided expectations or misunderstandings.

Developing a detailed document of duties does not mean replacing flexibility with rigidity. That is just an excuse for not having one, because such a detailed brief should include primary, secondary and additional expectations.



The explorer, Shackleton, made it clear that, in addition to his men's specific roles within the expedition, there was the expectation to help with all general work and whatever was required in an emergency. That said, even with all the uncertainty of what lay ahead, he still provided written briefs stating exactly their duties and what he expected from each of his crew. He knew

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that most work relationships fail because of misunderstandings and lack of communicating. Indeed, most job insecurity is related to lack of role clarification.

Every person connected with a business either increases or decreases profitability. Some people may have no visible effect on profits, but no effect actually translates into a loss because business is about making profit, not trading water. Everyone must know what is expected of them.

**If you are seeking to recruit, develop and retain** the right people then you have to establish this at the outset; and start as you mean for them to continue.

Most families know their roles because of high communication. It is, of course, relatively easy to maintain a family-like atmosphere when a company is small. As the number of personnel increases, however, a corporation tends toward bureaucratization and human relations grow formalized. Sociologists describe such change as moving from a primary group to a secondary group where reason not emotion governs human conduct.

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It is possible, however, to create a secondary group composed of many primary sub-groups and maintain communal ties within a functional association. The key is based on defining roles that people perform with mutual trust and respect. A good example of this is Lakeland, one of the UK's leading home-shopping business that as well as having 28 retail outlets sells more than 4,000 products through its website and catalogues.

Working with his two brothers, Martin and Julian, Sam has guided the company to enjoy consistent double-digit growth every year. Having had the opportunity to meet and work with many of the key people the one clear thing that is visibly evident is that every member has detailed roles and responsibilities.

**Award-winners for customer service**, Lakeland's success is based on continuous in-house training to ensure clarification of what is expected. Despite their growth from local plastic bag supplier to

national business with 20 million home deliveries a year of exclusive high quality practical products, the camaraderie of the whole business reflects a warm family atmosphere.

Walk into any Lakeland Store and you will immediately see that the business is run both efficiently and effectively because roles and responsibilities have been clarified.

*The questions to ask of your own business are:*

- 1. Have we determined, defined, clarified what we do?**
- 2. Are we able to articulate, communicate and duplicate it concisely?**
- 3. Have we established and detailed our purpose of position and the role required?**
- 4. Do we fully understand our functional responsibilities?**
- 5. Have we defined a plan with expectations?**
- 6. Have we agreed a strategy for fulfilling our role and responsibilities?**
- 7. Do we review our plan, expectations and strategy – regularly?**
- 8. Do we understand what motivates us?**

Good systems take time to put in place – and very often valuable time that a business cannot spare. But like a good habit that is hard to form but is actually much easier to live with, it is worth your time to establish roles, responsibilities and expectations. The alternative is to continue with the bad habits that have been easy to form but end up being hard to live with.