

DR. VINCE MOLINARO

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF THE LEADERSHIP CONTRACT

ACCOUNTABLE LEADERS



**INSPIRE A CULTURE WHERE EVERYONE
STEPS UP, TAKES OWNERSHIP,
AND DELIVERS RESULTS**

WILEY

Praise for *Accountable Leaders*

“Accountable Leaders outlines a compelling vision of leadership. Through our work at Mighty Networks, I know that when you create community and connection, it will fuel people to come together to do the extraordinary. Vince Molinaro shows exactly how you can build a vibrant community of leaders in your own company to tackle challenges, drive change, and create incredible results.”

Gina Bianchini, Founder & CEO, Mighty Networks

“Vince has created a simple, profound, and practical masterpiece to guide the mobilization of leadership accountability. The examples and tools he shares are clear, user-friendly, and resonate well regardless of industry you work in or size of your organization. He continues to demystify what it takes to develop great leaders.”

Giulia Cirillo, Senior Vice President and Chief Human
Resources Officer
Human Resources, PSP Investments

“Building on Vince's prior work, *Accountable Leaders* is a roadmap for leveraging talent and culture to drive transformational change. The performance driven organization achieves results through individuals and teams that are empowered and highly committed to the success of each other and the enterprise. As I reflect on what it means to me to be an accountable leader, I am excited to put these lessons into practice and share them with my team.”

Kurt Ekert, President and CEO, CWT

“As the future of work continues to evolve at breakneck speed, having a group of motivated and aligned leaders is critical to attaining real competitive advantage. In his latest

book, Vince Molinaro gives the leaders concrete strategies, whether they are the CEO or just starting their leadership journey, to step up and be more accountable.”

Brad Furtney, President, Fieldpoint Service Applications
Inc.

“Dr. Molinaro has once again written a great book needed in today's organizations. It was with great promise that I read this book after implementing key concepts from *The Leadership Contract* and seeing the game-changing impacts it had. And this book does not disappoint—filled with great stories, insights, and practical strategies, *Accountable Leaders* provides the roadmap to help all your leaders truly step up and drive the success of your company.”

Olga Giovanniello, Executive Vice President, People and
Culture,
Sienna Senior Living

The Leadership Contract contributed to strengthening our leadership and elevating our whole organization toward excellence. Now in *Accountable Leaders*, Vince Molinaro has written a grounded, practical, and easy-to-read book with new insights every company can implement to deal with today's uncertain and unstable markets.”

Matthias Goebel, General Manager Region Europa South,
Bosch Rexroth

“Vince Molinaro's latest work gets at the heart of the leadership challenges companies face today. More than ever, we need leaders who can step up to drive real innovation and change. *Accountable Leaders* provides practical insights and proven strategies that any company can implement to drive stronger leadership accountability at every level. If you need your leaders to be more effective

and accountable, this book is your guide. A masterful work and a must read!”

Josh Linkner, *New York Times* Bestselling Author, 5-Time Tech Entrepreneur, and World-Renowned Innovation Expert
“*Accountable Leaders* presents a vision of leadership where leaders need to step up to drive the success of their organizations, create inspiring and inclusive cultures and drive fundamental change at a personal, team, and organizational level. Our world needs great leaders today more than ever, and Vince Molinaro's book provides a roadmap for a compelling future.”

Laura A. Liswood, Secretary General, Council of Women World Leaders and author of *The Loudest Duck, Moving Beyond Diversity*

“This book unapologetically calls all leaders and organizations to step up and hold accountability front and center. Making a compelling case through insightful examples, Dr. Molinaro paints a startling and accurate picture of the price we pay for the lack of accountability. He then offers hope and direction by providing a clear way forward. Read this book and be inspired to be an accountable leader for yourself, for your team, and for your organization!”

Tricia Naddaff, President/Owner, MRG

“In his new book, Dr. Vince Molinaro dives deeply into what he believes is at the core of a leadership dilemma facing organizations—the lack of accountability—of leaders failing to step up and own their results, their people, and societal impact. The book is, however, full of hope and optimism, with a rigorous and systematic roadmap to instill and sustain leadership accountability throughout an organization. An essential read for any leader.”

Andrew Pateman, Vice-President, People, Culture and Performance, Canadian Blood Services

"Accountable Leaders addresses one of the most important qualities that every organization, leader, and employee must take seriously in order to have a successful culture and business. Through compelling stories, first-hand experiences, and thoughtful strategies, Vince makes a direct link between accountability and higher performance. Ignore this book at your own peril."

Dan Schawbel, author of *Back to Human, Promote Yourself & Me 2.0*

"Wow! At last a leadership book cast in reality! The notion of accountability leadership sums it all up. One who wants to lead any organisation must understand the meaning of leadership accountability and its outward focus...its accountability to others, to the organisation, to society, and more. This book is a must read!"

Sylvain Toutant, Board Director, Strategic Advisor and Speaker

"In *Accountable Leaders*, Dr. Vince Molinaro clearly shows how organizations can scale accountable leadership at every level. This book will be the go-to manual for any CEO, head of human resources or board looking to establish a strong leadership culture and drive successful transformation."

Dr. Ricardo Viana Vargas, Executive Director,
Brightline Project Management Institute

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*To Liz, for your friendship and unending support.
To Mateo, Tomas, and Alessia, for your daily inspiration.
To Mom and Dad, for your tremendous encouragement.
I am grateful to have you all in my life.*

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Introduction

Why do so many of us have such negative experiences with leadership? Why do our organizations have so many mediocre leaders? Why do so many of us work on terrible teams? why do we spend our careers in organizations with uninspiring and even dreadful cultures? More importantly, why do we put up with all of this?

You deserve better. We all deserve better. However, changing things means that you will need to be a better and more accountable leader. We will all need to be better and more accountable leaders. Why? Just look at the daily headlines or the newsfeeds on your smartphone. What do you see? Far too many stories of prominent leaders embroiled in scandal, corruption, sexual harassment, demonstrating unacceptable and even unethical behavior. Whether they are corporate CEOs, politicians, or other prominent figures, there are many disgraceful examples of leadership. These stories happen so often that we don't even notice anymore. We have become conditioned to accept this as the norm. Well, it's not—and we need to hold all leaders to a higher standard of behavior. You need to hold yourself to a higher standard of behavior.

Our experience with teams isn't much better. Research shows that only three in 10 employees believe that their co-workers are committed to doing quality work.¹ Most employees do the bare minimum to get by. We need to improve the quality and accountability of teams.

While business leaders talk about the importance of corporate culture, the sad reality is that very few of them have created compelling ones. research estimates that only 15 percent of companies have the culture they need to

succeed.² If an organization can't build an inspiring culture, it will not be able to attract and retain the best talent in their industry or drive sustained business results. We must do better, and this book will show you how.

Twenty-Five Countries and 80 Cities—the Story Is the Same

I spend a lot of time talking to people about leadership. I've traveled to 25 countries and about 80 cities in the last few years. In that time, I conducted hundreds of presentations, speeches, and media interviews. I've met with senior executives, boards, leaders at all levels, and employees. During my travels, I have also had the incredible experience of touching down in a city or country that was in the middle of a significant leadership story.

For example, on one business trip, I landed in São Paulo on a sunny Sunday morning. Little did I know that on that day, an estimated five million Brazilians would take to the streets to protest their corrupt political and corporate leaders. On another business trip, I arrived in the United Kingdom a few weeks after the initial Brexit vote. People were still bewildered by what had happened and were concerned about their future. I traveled to Madrid when the country was dealing with a crisis in government. Spaniards were at their wits' end with the lack of leadership shown by their politicians. I traveled to many cities in the United States during the 2016 presidential election. Many Americans kept asking, "How did we get here?" After the election, many I spoke to asked, "Now what are we going to do?" As worried as people were, I'm sure no one could have predicted the kind of leadership style that President Trump would unleash on the world. Since he's been in office, everyone has had a front-row seat

to see how he leads every day. A day doesn't pass when someone asks me to comment on U.S. President Donald Trump's leadership—everyone is trying to make sense of his divisive and confrontational approach to leading the world's most powerful country.

On another business trip, I was in the city of San Juan to see Puerto Ricans in the streets protesting the corruption in their government. The country was in turmoil. I then witnessed the celebrations when their governor stepped down in response to the protests. In all my discussions, as people reflected on these leadership stories, many were left wondering: "Is this what it means to be a leader?"

I arrived in New Zealand shortly after the tragic massacre of innocent people in Christchurch. We all witnessed the inspirational leadership of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern as she led her country through its grief. I was struck by how her leadership resonated with so many people around the world. Many proclaimed that she was an example of the kind of leader we need in the future—one who can bring integrity, resolve, and compassion to her leadership role and do it when it mattered most. Unfortunately, examples like Prime Minister Ardern are the exception. There have been far more stories of bad, inept, and uninspiring leadership.

I encountered other compelling leadership stories when I traveled to Chile, Germany, Italy, Panamá, Singapore, Australia, and other countries. Something interesting also happened during those trips. When people found out I was Canadian, many said how lucky I was to have Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as my political leader. It was immediately clear to me that he had made his mark on the world stage in his early days as prime minister. I was also really struck by these comments. When I asked why they thought Canadians were lucky to have him as their leader,

the answer was unanimous: “Well, because he’s so good looking!” Then I would respond, “What does that have to do with being a good leader?” It’s important to note that when he was first elected as Canada’s prime minister, he was an inspiration to many. But over time, he was involved in several scandals that left many questioning his judgment and integrity as a leader. He was fortunate to be re-elected as prime minister in the fall of 2019, but this time with only a minority government. Canadians sent him a message: They were expecting more from him as a leader. If he chooses, he now has a second chance to redefine how he leads in a way that restores the faith and hope that so many Canadians had in him when he first took office in 2015.

During all these trips, I was on the ground speaking to regular people like you and me. I was there to talk about leadership accountability. It was a good thing because, given the events taking place in real time in their countries, it was the only topic people wanted to discuss. Most of the time, I felt more like a foreign correspondent for the BBC or CNN than a leadership adviser. I heard a lot about people’s frustrations and disappointment with their leaders, their teams, and the cultures of their organizations. I also sensed their yearning for something better and more inspirational. It is clear to me that we are all desperate for exceptional leadership in our world and our organizations.

Is Anyone Happy?

What I have learned from all these experiences is that people are fed up. They are tired of being led by mediocre leaders, working on terrible teams, or being part of organizations with uninspiring cultures. Listening to people repeatedly vent and complain about their frustrations, I find myself asking: Is anyone happy? Are you happy?

Of course, some of us have had the good fortune to be led by great leaders. Some of us have been part of terrific teams and organizations with compelling cultures. Over my career, I have been lucky to be led by some great leaders. I have been part of some fantastic teams. I have also been in companies with inspiring cultures. Here's what these experiences have taught me. When you work for a great leader, you feel like you are at your best. When you are on a fantastic team, you feel safe and confident because everyone has your back. When you are part of an organization with an inspiring culture, you feel a powerful sense of unity and share a collective purpose. If you are lucky enough to experience all three, then your work brings you joy and meaning. It's fun, exciting, and even life-affirming.

I've also learned that these great experiences can ruin you forever. What I mean is that once you've seen what great is like, it's hard to put up with the bad, the mediocre, and the uninspiring. You've experienced good or even great, so you know that something better is indeed possible. At the same time, I've seen the price people have paid by working with a dreadful manager, being on a terrible team, or part of an organization with a toxic culture. Some of these people have never had a great experience in their professional lives. They do not even know that something better is possible. As a result, whenever I have found myself in situations that were downright awful, I worked hard to try to change them. And if I couldn't, I left the organization. Why? Simply because I have come to learn that life is too short to spend it being miserable at work.

This Is My Life's Work

I have spent close to three decades in my career helping leaders, teams, and organizations aspire to become the

best they can be. It all began when I was 27 years old and decided to start my own business. I left a large public-sector organization that did important work—it helped some of the neediest and most marginalized people in society get their lives back on track. We provided financial assistance, career development support, and access to retraining programs. The purpose of the organization was inspiring to me. Despite this, I quickly learned that the organization’s culture was drab and dreadful. In my time there, I saw Zinta, a senior manager, die of lung cancer, a disease she believed was a result of the stress she endured spending her career in a highly toxic work environment.³ This was devastating to me as Zinta was my mentor. At the time, I questioned whether her exposure to that toxic culture did indeed impact her health. Today, we know that it most likely did. In his book *Dying for a Paycheck*, Professor Jeffrey Pfeffer summarizes considerable research showing how toxic workplaces directly undermine people’s health and well-being.⁴ In the end, that experience with my mentor Zinta changed my life. It forced me to think hard about my career and my life’s work. Over time, I discovered my passion and mission: to work with people who aspired for more from their work. I wanted to work with individuals who wanted to be exceptional leaders, lead great teams, and create inspiring cultures.

At first, I provided career counseling services to private clients who were managers and senior managers in large organizations. They told me about the challenges they faced navigating their careers. I learned firsthand the impact that lousy leaders and mediocre managers have on employees—how they undermine confidence, create stress, and erode passion and engagement.

My clients also brought me into their companies. I ran seminars for employees, managers, and senior executives to help them deal with the volume of change taking place.

At that time, organizational change was a hot topic (much like it is today). In parallel to running my consulting business, I also completed two graduate degrees. I conducted research on change and leadership. When I finished my doctoral degree, I felt it was time to go back into an organization and apply everything I had learned in graduate school. I did that by joining a start-up pharmaceutical company with an amazing culture. I learned firsthand what it takes to build one, but also learned what happens when you do not focus on sustaining it over the long term.

A few years later, I returned to the world of consulting. I was part of a firm called Knightsbridge Human Capital Solutions, headquartered in Toronto. My experience allowed me to work with some fantastic clients and colleagues. I led the leadership practice within the firm. At a personal level, I worked hard to try to be a good leader, to build a great team, and to contribute to creating an inspiring culture across our organization. Our formula for success was simple: Hire amazing people dedicated to their clients, create valuable thought leadership and solutions, and establish a strong culture. We did just that and became a dominant brand in our industry.

Then in 2015, The Adecco Group and LHH (a world-leading provider of talent development and transition services) acquired Knightsbridge. A new opportunity emerged for me. Now I was part of a global Fortune 500 company, and I was given a role with clear marching orders: Take the success formula that my team and I had implemented at Knightsbridge and export it globally. We did, and due to the commitment of many exceptional colleagues, we helped leaders around the world become more accountable to drive the success of their organizations.

My career came full circle when I decided it was time to start my own company again, which I did in January 2019. I felt I needed to focus 100 percent of my energy to my life's work and mission. In many ways, I have the same sense of purpose and zeal that I had when I was 27 years old. All the experiences over my career have given me a unique perspective on leadership which I gained by consulting to C-Suite leaders, designing and delivering award winning leadership programs for my clients, conducting research, and in leading successful businesses. As I look at the leadership landscape today and over the next decade, it's clear that leadership matters more than it ever has. We need stronger leadership throughout our world. But exactly what kind of leadership do we need?

It's About Leadership Accountability

What my work with clients has taught me is that if you want to improve as a leader, a team, or a company, the quickest and most enduring way to do this is by focusing on leadership accountability. When you do, it immediately puts you on a different trajectory.

In my book *The Leadership Contract*,⁵ I define leadership accountability as the ability of individuals in leadership roles to step up and demonstrate personal ownership for their roles, be deliberate and decisive in the way they lead, and bring a sense of urgency, courage, and resilience to the position. They must not only demonstrate this accountability at a personal level, but they must also ensure it exists within their teams and with other leaders across their organization. They need to help inspire others to step up, take ownership, and deliver results. However, what I have discovered is that we have many people in leadership roles who simply are not accountable. They are more committed to the technical aspects of their roles—

whether they are accountants, engineers, sales professionals, analysts, marketers, or investment bankers, to name a few. They do not bring the same level of personal commitment to the leadership aspects of their roles. I have come to learn many do not even define themselves as leaders, even though they have a leadership role within their company. They essentially treat leadership as a part-time job—something they do in addition to being technical experts.

I came to realize that our organizations are filled with thousands of part-time leaders. One of the primary reasons this has happened is because a lot of people get into leadership roles by accident. They excel at something technical, and organizations go to these individuals and promote them into leadership roles. The underlying assumption is that strong technical performance would translate into strong leadership performance. Sometimes that is true; but we've learned in practice that most of the time it isn't. As a result, many companies have significant leadership accountability gaps. They have people in leadership roles who simply are not stepping up or leading in a way that their company expects.

My clients asked me to help them find a way forward to resolve this problem. In my book, I positioned the critical idea of a *leadership contract* that stipulates those in leadership roles must understand they are held to a higher standard of behavior. This idea of a *leadership contract* has always existed, but we have never made it explicit with leaders. In fact, many people who are in leadership roles have treated the leadership contract like an online contract—you know, the one that comes up on your laptop or tablet with all the terms and conditions. When it does, most of us simply scroll down to the bottom of the screen and click “agree” without reading a single word. You know you are bound to something; you are not quite sure what that is.

This analogy has resonated with a lot of leaders I work with. They acknowledge that they haven't been deliberate in considering what they signed up for when they took on a leadership role. Now, given the challenges that leaders will face today and over the next decade, it's critical that this idea of a leadership contract becomes explicit and that leaders appreciate what they actually signed up for in their roles.

In 2013, when the first edition of *The Leadership Contract* was released, these ideas immediately resonated in the marketplace. No matter where I went, or whom I talked to, I repeatedly heard the same thing: "This is what we've been missing. We need people in leadership roles to understand what it means to be a leader. They need to understand that they've signed up for something important, and we need them to step up and be accountable." "They can't simply be committed to only the technical parts of their roles; they need to fully commit to being accountable leaders." Those who read my book described it as a *mindset* book about leadership because it helps leaders understand how they need to think about their roles and what they must pay attention to every single day.

I believe this idea of *leadership accountability* resonated because I've come to appreciate that as humans, we expect more of people in leadership roles. We hope that they will step up and lead, create exceptional organizations, and even make the world a better place. When they succeed, we praise them, admire them, and even want to emulate them. However, when they fail to step up in a crisis, misbehave, or are simply mediocre, we feel a sense of disappointment, despair, and even disgust.

As a leader, you need to understand that you signed a *leadership contract* and that it comes with four terms and conditions (see [Figure I.1](#)). Let's explore them now.



Figure I.1 The Four Terms of The Leadership Contract

1. Leadership Is a Decision

When you are in a leadership role, you must be fully committed to your role. You must be clear on the expectations of the role and be ready to set the tone for others. You will not be successful as a leader until you are fully committed because this is what the role demands. You can't approach your leadership role lightly or be ambivalent about it. You certainly can't opt out. You must be all in, especially in today's world. The constant change,

disruption, and complexity that leaders face today is considerable. If you aren't prepared to lead in this environment, then you must decide that a leadership role may not be for you and have the courage to make that decision. If, however, you decide you want to be an accountable leader, then you must fully commit.

2. Leadership Is an Obligation

Once you decide to be an accountable leader, you quickly realize that you will be held to a higher standard of behavior. We expect a lot from anyone in a leadership role today. You must also recognize that you will have obligations that go beyond yourself. It's not just about what is best for you and your career. You are obligated to your customers and employees, your organization, and the communities in which you do business. You need to create enduring value and leave things better than you found them. In this book, we will discuss your obligation to hold others accountable to be leaders, to build truly accountable teams, and to work with other leaders to establish strong leadership accountability throughout your organization.

3. Leadership Is Hard Work

Leadership isn't for the feeble—you need resilience, resolve, and determination. You will need personal tenacity to rise above the daily pressures and lead your organization into the future. You will need confidence and courage to have tough conversations and to push through barriers to strategy execution. This term of the leadership contract demands that you get tough with yourself and do the hard work that you must do as a leader. Unfortunately, too many leaders shy away from the hard work. You can't avoid or wimp out on it. If you do, it will weaken you, weaken your team, impede your progress, and ultimately prevent you from delivering results.

4. Leadership Is a Community

The fourth term of the leadership contract demands that you connect with others to create a strong community of leaders in your organization. You need to work with your peers to create a leadership culture in which there is a sense of deep trust and mutual support, where you know everyone has your back, and where all leaders share the collective aspiration to be truly accountable. You will need to break down silos, work across departments and functions, and learn to bring a one-company perspective to your role. If you can, you will stand out as an invaluable leader in your organization.

Accountability Breeds Accountability —The Ripple Effect

Take some time to reflect on the four terms of the leadership contract. To what extent are you a truly accountable leader? Is your team as accountable as it can be? Does your organization have a culture that inspires others to step up and deliver results? If you are honest with yourself, like most leaders I work with, you will come to realize that there is an opportunity for you to be more accountable in your current role. That's one lesson I learned in my own leadership roles. As accountable as I thought I may have been, if I were honest with myself, I could see more ways to step up and be even more accountable. Here's something else I learned along the way: You can't ask anyone else to be accountable if you are not accountable yourself. You must lead by example. Why? Because accountability breeds accountability. Let me repeat that: *Accountability breeds accountability.*

If you set the right tone, most everyone will follow. It's like a ripple effect that can happen in a still pond. I'm sure you