



Do Your Employees Own Their Position?

We often hear frustrated business owners question why they can't get more of their employees to take ownership of their roles. Is it the hiring? Is it the culture? Can you not hire great employees anymore? We've covered this in other articles and know there is a combination of factors at play here, but mostly it's that your business is designed to get the results you are currently getting. **If you want more employees to take ownership, your business needs to do something different.** In this series, we're going to look at what "something different" means.

As a business owner how you define "take ownership of a task" may be very different than your employees. Your definition has been crafted over years of experience and the sheer knowledge that your business depends on the results of the work that you do. Most business owners have a personal connection to their business. It's your name, your reputation, and your livelihood at stake. You see a bigger part of the puzzle and understand how it connects in a way that some employees may not need to ever know or experience. Thus when you hand a task over to an employee, you know what it means to be "done" with the task, but do they? If you don't define it then you are asking your employees to read your mind or depend on their past experiences which are often limited and/or filled with bad habits.

Now you may be thinking of a key employee that you can simply turn a task over to and know that it's done. An employee who is persistent, has great follow through, and simply gets things done. You may be thinking, if only I could clone that employee. Well, we don't have the cloning machine ready to go, but we can assure you that you can clone the process needed to train EVERY employee to take ownership of a task.

The first step is to define what taking ownership of a task means. It seems simple, but putting down your expectations in writing is a huge first step. It sets the foundation for all future conversations and more importantly sets the point of view everyone in your company needs to hold. The definition becomes a guide to redirect the conversation back to the results the business needs each and every time there is an issue with someone not taking ownership of a task. A sample definition is below.

This document is confidential and proprietary to [Benchmark Business Group, LLC](#) and cannot be used, disclosed, or duplicated without the prior written consent of [Benchmark Business Group, LLC](#). This is an unpublished work protected by federal copyright laws.



What Does Taking Ownership of a Task Mean?

- **Results:** Finished means that it is 100% done to the satisfaction of the business and the agreed upon result has been reached.
- **Resources:** If you don't have the tools, the data, or resources to complete a task that has been assigned to you then you speak up until you get what you need.
- **Pleasantly Persistent:** If you are waiting on someone else, even your manager or the business owner, to provide you with an answer, or for them to take an action so you can move forward with a task, then you keep following up with that person until you have what you need.
- **Problem Solve:** If you run into a barrier, you keep searching solutions until you solve the problem and reach the result - never stop!
- **Ask for Help:** If you need help, proactively ask and do not stop until you have what you need.
- **True Delegation:** There is no handing off of the task. You follow it through until it is done. In some cases you might delegate parts of the task, but it's your responsibility until the agreed upon result has been reached.

We challenge you to define what taking ownership of a task means to you. You can start with our sample above or write your own. We encourage you to make it sound like your culture. It should be something that is easy and familiar for you to repeat. Then continue as we look at the process for getting an employee to take ownership of one task.



Frustration-Free Management

We've already discussed that in order to have your employees take ownership of a task you first need to define what taking ownership means to your business. If you haven't yet defined taking ownership, we encourage you to do so now or at least look at our sample definition. Now, we recommend you focus on one task one employee should take ownership of.

We'll focus on how to walk an employee through discovering what needs to be different. But before we look at the process of ensuring an employee is set up to take ownership of a task, there are two factors you need to consider regarding the tone of the conversation:

- **Keep the conversation focused on systems and structure:** This should not be a personal or emotional conversation. It should be about what the employee needs in place in order to take ownership of the task. At this point, what has happened in the past should be discussed; NOT to place blame, but instead as examples of barriers they need to overcome.
- **Be willing to adapt:** Asking others to take accountability sometimes forces a spotlight on weaknesses in your business. We've seen these conversations lead to the discovery of failures in a system, highlight inefficiencies in manager's or owner's responses to employees, or showcase the lack of tools to get the task completed. It can be embarrassing to go from asking your employee to take ownership of a task to realizing that there is something in your business that needs to be fixed.

In truth, often times the lack of taking ownership is a mixture of lack of structure in the business AND employees not taking ownership. Just as an employee shouldn't take this conversation personally, neither should you as a business owner. Sometimes you may be the bottleneck, but this process is all about solving the problems not about placing blame. Keep the focus on what results the business needs and be willing to adapt the design of the business to reach those results.

This document is confidential and proprietary to [Benchmark Business Group, LLC](#) and cannot be used, disclosed, or duplicated without the prior written consent of [Benchmark Business Group, LLC](#). This is an unpublished work protected by federal copyright laws.



At times, the conversation may shift to blame and venture away from the results that the business needs. It's up to you to truly facilitate the conversation. You do this by walking through each bullet point in the definition with the employee and ask them what stops/prevents them from fulfilling this part of the definition. Your goal is to be curious and really try to help understand what is causing the issue. Using our definition from last week, sample questions might be:

- **Results:** What are the defined results of this task? Do we have a documented system that we can reference that defines the results? Can the employee tell you in their own words how they know the result has been achieved?
- **Resources:** What do they feel they don't have that they need in order to take ownership of this task? What systems/tools do they have access to, but may not know, or use? Have they had any issues accessing tools or resources in the past for this task? What do you need from the business moving forward?
- **Pleasantly Persistent:** What language do they use when following up with someone who hasn't gotten a step done when they said they would? What systems or structure do they use to know who they need to follow up with? If they are waiting on someone else to take action, who else needs to know and when do they need to know? What issues have they had with this in the past and how can they handle that moving forward?
- **Problem Solve:** What barriers do they typically encounter? How can/should they handle them? Do they have any tools or resources they use for problem solving? Is there a mindset of giving up that needs to be addressed?
- **Ask for Help:** For this task, who and where can they go for help? What's the best method of seeking help from that person or resource? What barriers have they encountered in the past when seeking help and how might they handle that in the future?
- **True Delegation:** What tools do you use to delegate a task? How do you communicate with someone you've delegated a task to? How do you

This document is confidential and proprietary to [Benchmark Business Group, LLC](#) and cannot be used, disclosed, or duplicated without the prior written consent of [Benchmark Business Group, LLC](#). This is an unpublished work protected by federal copyright laws.



remember who to follow up with when you have delegated a task? What issues have you run into with delegation in the past with this task? Does the employee understand, even with delegation, that they still own the task?

If your definition is different, you will need to customize the questions that you ask. Be sure to ask and don't just tell the answer. If you want the employee to take ownership you'll want to understand how they think about the task and what truly is getting in their way.

Time to Build Ownership of a Task

Quote: “The greatest gifts you can give your children are the roots of responsibility and the wings of independence.” ~ Denis Waitley

Our thoughts: Your business is designed to get the results it is getting. If your employees are not taking ownership of a task then you need to look at how to design your business to get those results. In the past we wrote about the Top Three Systems your employees need to have ownership of their role or the roots of responsibility. In this series, we're focusing on a micro view of each task so that you can give your employees the wings of independence. We won't pretend that this is easy. It's not. In fact, it can be frustrating. We all want the result, but the businesses that succeed are the ones that are willing to do the work. We challenge you to think about the time devoted to making sure your employees have both the roots of responsibility and the wings of independence.

Question: How much time is your business willing to invest to ensure that your employees have the "roots of responsibility and the wings of independence?"

Taking Ownership of Management

We've focused on how, as a business owner, you get your team to take on ownership of a single task. If you've followed along you've defined what taking ownership of a task means, you've created a guide to handing ownership of a task over to an individual, and you've looked at the time you need to devote to this. The last step is making sure that the idea of ownership is not a one-and-done topic in your business.



Having a business where your team takes on ownership of a task is often a welcome relief for business owners, but imagine if your team had ownership of every task they are responsible for completing? This is a part of what we call, "**Value Realized.**" It's what we work with business owners every day to accomplish, but it doesn't end here. If you truly want the vision of a business where every employee has ownership, then YOU need to take ownership of the culture that drives the vision.

- **Schedule the next check in on this task** - Even with the best employee and following the previous steps, you will need to check in with an employee on a task. Don't expect perfection from day one. Expect that there will be stumbles and frustrations in implementing ownership of a task. Set realistic expectations, be prepared to go back through the process till the business gets it right, and mark time on your calendar so you don't forget to check in on the progress. **Remember, the entries on your calendar are insights into what is important to your business.** If you're not willing to calendar time for this you're sending a strong signal to your business about what is really important.
- **Pick the next task from job description** - When you are feeling confident that an employee has ownership of one task, don't stop! We often see business owners make the fatal assumption that because they have ownership of one task they now have ownership of all tasks. Each task or responsibility has its own unique set of barriers to overcome that will stop an employee from taking on ownership. Over time, you may see that employees develop a different way of thinking about tasks, but it takes repetition. Stopping this process too early will set the employee up for failure and lead to disappointment.
- **Know that not all employees will make the cut** -This isn't a magic pill. You will still have employees that either decides not to be a part of your team or that don't have the skill sets. This process makes sure that you give your team every advantage and opportunity to play, but if someone simply doesn't have the skills or the desire, you will have to make a tough decision.



With that in mind, know the work you've done in this process isn't in vain.
The work will help you train the next employee faster and with better results.

In the end, having employees that take ownership of a task begins at the top of the business. The business has to take ownership of providing employees with what they need to take ownership of each task, which can include training, systems, and resources. As we mentioned earlier, this can sometimes point out flaws in how your business is currently designed, but there is a proven solution. You just have to decide, are you willing to take on ownership of it?