

Above the line

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Below the line

## Staying Above The Line



**Art Waskey**

Art Waskey is a speaker who truly delivers. In addition to a 45 year career in sales and marketing, Art is the author of multiple books on selling and a monthly column *The Art of Sales*. He shares these insights as an in demand event and conference speaker as well as leadership coach.

### Be Part of the Solution

Throughout my career in executive leadership, I have had relationships with people who were critical of the company that employed us. These were generally successful, mid-level managers. I would listen to their issues, ask questions, and consider their opinions. My parting words were always the same, "Please get back to me with possible solutions to the problem." Most did not follow up on that request and perhaps felt that I was being dismissive. However, I have always believed **if you aren't part of the solution, you are part of the problem**. We all need to take steps to accountability.

In "*The Oz Principle*", authors Roger Connors, Tom Smith, and Craig Hickman classify complaining

individuals as being part of *The Blame Game*. These people typically take a wait and see attitude or cover their trail, do some finger pointing, and ignore/deny the facts. "It's not my job," or, "I'm confused: tell me what to do," are common refrains among the complainers. Unchecked, malcontents can demoralize an organization. They can operate at what Connors, Smith, and Hickman call, "**Below the Behavior Line, an environment where no one acknowledges the truth of the situation.**"

### The Blame Game

It's often easier to ignore a touchy situation than to address it head on. As an example, a senior vice president of a company shared with me that the president of his company recently met

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with another vice president behind closed doors. At day's end, the vice president of finance came into his office. He was very upset. He had inadvertently discovered the president was about to fire him. After the president's meeting with the other VP, the door to the conference room had been left open. The VP of Finance went in and discovered a new organizational chart on the board. His name was not on it.

**It took a month** for the president to muster the courage to fire the VP of Finance. The senior VP then told the president that the VP of finance knew he was about to get fired a month earlier. The president was upset with the senior VP for not letting him know sooner. The senior VP explained that because he wasn't part of the decision in the closed door meeting a month earlier, he didn't feel it was his responsibility to say anything to the president. The senior VP had been playing *The Blame Game* — avoiding the facts — for over a month.

I was asked to come in to help rebuild confidence in the company. The relationship between the president and his senior VP was restored when we addressed their lack of accountability to each other. Both

were operating *Below the Line*, playing *The Blame Game*. This story is not an isolated occurrence!

### Steps to Accountability

To operate *Above the Line*, "The Oz Principle" lists these progressive steps to accountability.

- **See it** – Recognize and acknowledge the full reality of the situation.
- **Own it** – Accept responsibility for the experiences and realities you create for yourself and others.
- **Solve it** – Change the reality by finding and implementing solutions to the problems. Be creative. Avoid the trap of falling back *Below the Line* when obstacles present themselves.
- **Do it** – Have the courage to follow through with identified solutions, even if they involve a lot of risk.

### Stay Above the Line

Practice these four steps. By doing so, you can stay *Above the Line* and out of *The Blame Game*. These steps also help those around you from falling *Below the Line*.

## 5 KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. It's often easier to ignore a touchy situation than to address it head on.
2. Recognize and acknowledge the full reality of each situation.
3. Accept responsibility for the experiences you create for yourself and others.
4. Change the reality by finding and implementing solutions to the problems.
5. Have the courage to follow through with identified solutions.