



# COMMAND RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

By William Young

*“Character in many ways is everything in leadership. It is made up of many things, but I would say character is really integrity. When you delegate something to a subordinate, for example, it is absolutely your responsibility, and he must understand this. You as a leader must take complete responsibility for what the subordinate does.”*

Dwight D. Eisenhower

**T**here should be no doubt — SWAT commanders are responsible and accountable not only for mission outcomes, but for team and individual performance. The difference between responsibility and accountability is subtle but simple. You are responsible if you did or did not do something. You are accountable if you own the action or inaction.

Consider the following example: During a call out, your team conducts a stealth entry into a structure and is compromised by an operator who fails to use appropriate noise discipline. The suspect is alerted before the team can control and apprehend him, and he engages them with gunfire.

What caused the outcome? Was the operator not trained properly in

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stealth movement? Perhaps he was fatigued or ill. Maybe his gear was not appropriate for the mission. Or maybe he was not mentally prepared for the mission due to personal or job-related problems or issues. Was he not capable

of performing the task due to a lack of physical fitness? Possibly a covert entry was not the appropriate tactic at the time.

One or more of the above, or any number of other reasons, could have contributed to the results. However, at the end of the day you are accountable for the outcome of the mission; the operator is responsible for the actions which caused the compromise.

In addition to being accountable for the mission outcome, you bear responsibility for any mistakes and the lack of preparedness on the part of the operator or team. Leaders need to remain responsible for performance, accountability, authenticity and integrity within the organization. Too often leaders continue to be rewarded even as the organization flounders.<sup>1</sup>

As a leader and team commander, you are responsible for ensuring all team members are trained and prepared in every way for each mission. If you fail to take responsibility for every aspect of the team, you are not a leader. You are just an inert observer and reporter of circumstances.

It is the responsibility of the commander to know each operator's strengths and weaknesses, to put them in situations and positions to succeed and to play to their strengths. Leaders also have a moral obligation to empower their followers and promote their growth and development. The

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leader's focus should never be on self-interest, but on others — the interests, needs and aspirations of the organization and its members.<sup>2</sup>

Commanders should always celebrate successes by recognizing and lauding their team and individual efforts and sacrifices. Mission failures, however, as well as other team problems and negative issues, rest squarely on the shoulders of the commander, who bears the responsibility to correct the problems.

As Dwight D. Eisenhower said, "Leadership consists of nothing but taking responsibility for everything that goes wrong and giving your subordinates credit for everything that goes well." //



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#### ENDNOTES

1. Hollander, E. P. "Ethical Challenges in the Leader-Follower Relationship," *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 5: p. 55-66, 1995.
2. Ciulla, J. B. "Leadership Ethics: Mapping the Territory." *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 34 (1): p. 67-86, 1995.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Capt. William Young is retired from the Pennsylvania State Police, where he served many years with the Special Emergency Response Team. He is currently employed by G4S Government Solutions Inc. and serves

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