

SALEM THYNE
ROBERT HUNT

NOBODY CARES (until you do)

Living beyond the Blame, Excuses,
and Doubts That Hold You Back

Advantage[®]

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*We dedicate this book to the amazing wives God has given us:
Soreya Thyne and Kathy Hunt. Thank you for patiently supporting us
as we invested the time and resources to make this book a reality.
We also recognize that we talked about accountability way more than a
wife should have to listen to any topic, and that you supported us as we
applied and practiced this in our lives each day.*

*We are blessed to be loved by such beauties
and thankful to have you by our side.*

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FOREWORD

When Salem Thyne and Robert Hunt first began talking about accountability, it was anchored in a business context, as part of a discussion within Renaissance Executive Forums, the CEO peer group Robert leads in Dallas, designed to equip leaders to achieve their personal and professional goals.

Salem showed Robert the well-known “Accountability Ladder” graphic, and this sparked an ongoing conversation about how accountability affects all areas, not simply for leaders or organizations, but for families, schools, and communities. Too often, Robert and Salem lamented, individuals fail to recognize that the power to effect positive change can begin by accepting responsibility—by becoming accountable.

This book is the result of their intensive exploration of the stages of accountability, the step-by-step navigation that can transform victims into victors. Robert and Salem speak with authenticity of the challenges they’ve faced and the changes they’ve made, personally and professionally, to become more accountable in all areas of life.

In this book, they coach readers in this journey, equipping them with the skills and knowledge to take control of their thoughts, actions, and behaviors in order to become truly accountable in their

relationships, their decision making, their work, and how they choose to live.

Salem and Robert's goals for this book are clear:

- Impact and change lives, including ours
- Open people's minds to the potential of living victoriously
- Empower leaders to free their teams
- Help people who are struggling to make this climb on their own

This is a book for every reader who wants to push past long-held limitations and obstacles, for employers to share with their employees, and for parents to share with teens—for everyone who wants a better life.

Every day, you have the opportunity to make a choice. You can choose to take responsibility for yourself and your life going forward; or you can rely on excuses, blaming others, saying you can't, and waiting for change to happen to you. You can choose to be a victim or a victor.

Robert Hunt and Salem Thyne want to equip you to become accountable—to acknowledge reality, accept responsibility, and move toward your goals with fresh energy and enthusiasm. In this book, they explain how. With a message that is clear, inspiring, and motivating, they help you navigate through each stage of the journey from victim to victor, identifying how to overcome obstacles and sharing strategies and tips, key resources you can rely on when facing setbacks and challenges. They explain the transition from lack of awareness to acknowledging your reality, accepting the past without letting it write your future story.

This is an empowering book, full of Robert and Salem's honesty, transparency, trademark humor, and plenty of tough love. They have seen the impact accountability has had on their lives. They've used

these principles with family members, with colleagues, and as leaders in their own organizations. Now, they want to see their message of the power of personal accountability spread—to help others lead a better life, a rich and full and motivated life.

“Most people are ignorant of the accountability life requires us to have. They have become comfortable being a victim and don’t even know that there is a better way. We want people to stop blaming others and live a life full of peace and joy as they face the challenges of life. We want them to see that they can be victorious.”

INTRO DUCTION

This Is Accountability

You made a choice when you picked up this book. Whatever attracted you to the subject matter, whatever called to you and said, “Hey, read *this*,” it was a first step on a journey that could take you somewhere better than where you are right now. In fact, no matter where that happens to be, we can almost guarantee your life will be better if you read this book. It has been for us!

The key word there being *if*. That’s kind of what accountability is all about.

But before we get into that, we should let you know who we are and why we think we’re qualified to talk about this subject. We’re Salem Thyne and Robert Hunt—husbands, dads, business leaders, and transplants from Southern California to the Dallas/Fort Worth area of Texas. Robert is the owner of Renaissance Executive Forums Dallas, an international CEO peer group designed to equip business leaders to achieve their personal and professional goals—which, to put it a little more simply, means he brings business leaders together to help each other be their best. Salem is a member of that group and the CEO of Fort Worth–based oil and gas firm Engineered Salinity. So those are our day jobs.

Our obsession with accountability started when Salem showed Robert the “Accountability Ladder” graphic from the book *The Oz Principle*, by Craig Hickman, Roger Connors, and Tom Smith. The ladder is a popular tool in the business world that helps managers diagnose and deal with accountability issues among their employees by determining where they fall on an imaginary ladder. The ladder

itself is a scale that starts at complete cluelessness and reaches all the way up to total accountability.

We initially started talking about the accountability ladder in a business context, and as the application of these principles took off, we realized that accountability doesn't end at 6:00 p.m. or whenever you get off work. Accountability, and conversely a lack of accountability, impacts *all* areas—not just leaders or organizations but families, schools, communities, governments, and the entire world. All too often our problems can be traced to the simple fact that most people don't know that the power to effect positive change in any of these (or other) areas can begin simply by accepting responsibility—by becoming accountable. And everyone, including you, has that superpower.

That's why we wrote this book.

The Accountability Mountain

When we took accountability out of a strictly business context and applied it to other areas of life, it became clear that the journey to real accountability is less like a ladder and more like a mountain. After you climb out of the muck of ignorance and blame and begin to accept your reality and become accountable, you have some options. Once you pass the point where you're able to accept your reality, it's easy and acceptable to reach a level where you're comfortable and stay there. You can't really do that with a ladder, which is basically designed to move you straight up (or down) and keep you constantly climbing until you reach the top. There aren't many spots where it's comfortable to stop and rest. With a mountain, the climb is more gradual. You can take time to stop and enjoy the view, think about where you might want to go next, or replenish your energy before moving on.

And you don't need to go all the way to the summit—reaching a lower peak may be all you want or need. Although once you experience the power of accountability in your own life, we're willing to bet you will press on to the top.

We know this because we've seen the impact accountability has had on our lives and the lives of the people around us. That's why we're so passionate about this topic. We used the same principles we're going to explore in this book with ourselves, with family members, and with colleagues, as leaders in our organizations as well as in our day-to-day lives. And the impact has been incredible. So now that we've passed the R&D phase, we're ready to share the message of the power of peak accountability with the world and with you, as well as a path to get up that metaphorical mountain. We truly believe it will help you lead a better life—a rich, full, and motivated life.

Which all sounds awesome ... but also begs the question, “What exactly *is* accountability?”

You Own It

In our minds, accountability comes down to these three words. *You own it.* There are fancier, longer definitions, but we think this sums it up beautifully. Late for a meeting? You own it. Missed your credit card payment? You own that too. There's no the-dog-ate-my-homework-traffic-was-a-nightmare-my-mother-didn't-love-me BS. There's also no that's-not-fair-nobody-told-me-it's-not-my-job or any of that head trash. It's on you. You did it or you didn't do it. You are responsible. There's no one else to point a finger at but you. Why? Because you own it.

We may all come from different circumstances, but regardless of where you start in life or what you bring to the table, ultimately what

happens next is determined by your choices. For example, imagine you're in a situation where you really, really need money, as quickly as possible. You can

- a. go knock over a liquor store, or
- b. hustle and ask everyone you know if there's any work in or outside your field that anyone they know might hire you to do.

Both of these options will lead to the same result—money in your pocket. But if you choose to rob a liquor store (or cheat on your spouse, or lie to your boss), you can't ever say it didn't happen. You can't reset it. You can't erase it. There's no going back in time. You own it.

Once you make a choice in your life, you will automatically face consequences, whatever they might be.

That's the key to accountability—understanding that the decisions you make have consequences. You have to either be able to accept those consequences and all that they entail or take a path that guarantees you won't have to. However, there's a silver lining to the momentary pain that comes with owning it. When you own a problem, you can actually fix the problem. For example, if you chose option (b) in the example above, the extra work might help you solve

your money problems in the short term and then the long term.

That's the key to accountability—understanding that the decisions you make have consequences.

The point is that ultimately, you are in control of your own life, success, happiness, health, and peace—not your boss or your teacher or the government or the system. That's something we're not told and we're not taught anymore,

maybe because the institutions that used to teach us what accountability meant, like church every Sunday or scouting after school or workplaces where you spent your entire career, are less common in modern life. But—and this is going to be a theme you’ll see a lot in this book—“Who cares?”

Yes, our lives are more fragmented. Yes, the traditional structures that used to provide a framework may have less influence over society at large. But forgive us if we have kumquats for brains, but so what? Your church can’t make you happy. Your job can’t make you happy (or unhappy, for that matter). Maybe they can provide some tools and show you how to use them. But ultimately, no one can control your happiness except you. Because no one can hold you accountable but you.

Salem’s Lot

Salem was first introduced to the concept of accountability when he was a senior in high school, courtesy of his AP English teacher. Back then, Salem was one of those kids who thought he knew more than everybody else because he was seventeen and super smart. He didn’t need to work hard to get through school, so he spent the entire first half of his senior year screwing around, challenging his teacher on assignments, and fighting her about every little thing, just to mess with her. It wasn’t that he didn’t know he needed that credit to graduate high school; it was more that, because he was a super-smart kid, there was no doubt in his mind that he would get it.

Still, at some point it must have dawned on Salem that he might be cutting it close. But he figured, “So what if I kind of dug myself a hole? She’ll let me do a whole bunch of extra assignments on the back end and dig my way out.” So Salem reached an agreement with

his teacher to do just that. Or something like an agreement. At least Salem *thought* she'd do it. Because why wouldn't she? He was, after all, super smart. He *deserved* to graduate.

By graduation day, Salem had done a pile of extra assignments and term papers nobody else did (to make up for the fact that he didn't do all the work that everybody else did earlier in the year). As long as he aced his final, he was confident he would get a free pass and slide through, and everything would be fine.

Graduation day in Bakersfield, California, where Salem is from, is kind of a goof-off day. Nobody really goes to school; they just hang out and play volleyball with their friends. But Salem must have had some kind of feeling, because he went into the school real quick, just to make sure he'd done well on his AP English final. His teacher delivered the good news: "Yeah, you got an A—you aced your final. Great job." Mission accomplished. Salem went back to the volleyball game and then home to get ready for graduation that night.

At about four o'clock in the afternoon, Salem's father, who also happens to be super smart, with a PhD to prove it, called him over. "Hey," he said, "I got a call from your school."

"Oh," said Salem. "What did they want?"

His dad looked at him. "You're not graduating."

Oh, crap.

Then he said, "I don't think I can say anything more to you that's going to make you feel more upset than you are now." (Something Salem was very grateful for at the time.)

But ultimately, his dad was right. Salem was devastated, shocked, humiliated, a little confused, and really, really angry ... all at the same time. His teacher had told him it would be okay! Or at least she'd let him think it would. He went through all the possible reasons why this life-altering catastrophe had befallen him.

The teacher was a (w)itch. The system was unfair. Actually, *life* was unfair. The head trash was piling up fast and furious, and his brain was starting to swim.

A friend's mother somehow convinced him to go to graduation anyway, so he did. And when he showed up, it was obvious that the decision to deny him his diploma had been made on very short notice. Because sitting in the middle of all his classmates up on the stage was a single empty chair. A chair with his name on it. Right next to Linh Tran (a name that still haunts Salem to this day, thirty years later).

Salem sat down in the auditorium and looked at all his friends up on stage. He stared at the empty seat next to Linh Tran where he should have been sitting. And he felt like crap.

For the first time in his life, Salem was experiencing *consequences* for the actions he had taken and the things he had done. And in that moment, watching all his friends and Linh Tran move into the next phase of their lives, he also realized ... he had a choice.

He could blame everything on everyone else and be pissed off and accept the life of a loser and a failure and a high school dropout. Or maybe he could do what some of his friends were suggesting and file a grievance, or challenge the school board, or ask his parents to intervene on his behalf.

But there was also a third option that, for some reason, held some appeal. He could actually accept the consequences of his actions. He could own it. And that's what Salem chose to do. He went on to complete his education and was a shining star in the Nuclear Navy Program, and he became a confident leader in the business world.

That was Salem's first experience with accountability. It wouldn't be his last ... but it was a good place to start.

* * *

We shared this story for a reason. We were all that kid once. Robert was definitely that kid, as you will learn in chapter 1. Maybe, in some ways, you're still that kid now. And, hey, that's perfectly fine. No judgment here. Because you're here now. The only thing that matters is what happens next. None of us is born accountable, and we've never met anyone who is accountable *all* the time. Accountability is a choice you can make every single day, in big moments and small ones. There's always going to be another opportunity to choose to take responsibility for yourself and your life as opposed to relying on excuses, blaming others, and/or waiting for change to happen to you. You get to choose to be a victim or a victor. There's more power in that than you can possibly imagine.

The path to peak accountability is a journey that is never over. The two of us are constantly pushing ourselves to be more and more accountable—just when we think we've reached the summit, we realize that we can still do more, we can still be better. It's more like a state of mind you adopt rather than a place that you reach and the journey ends. However, you don't have to get that far up the mountain to start reaping the rewards of facing your life and yourself more honestly. Accountability is a skill you can practice and learn, like a

Accountability is a skill you can practice and learn, like a muscle you can develop. The more you practice it, the more it works, the easier it gets, and the better your results get.

muscle you can develop. The more you practice it, the more it works, the easier it gets, and the better your results get.

Most people don't know this. Most people are basically ignorant of the accountability we should (and can) all take on in life. We certainly were when we started this journey. It's easy

to get comfortable being a victim, and you'll certainly have plenty of company there. Because most people don't know that there is a better way. We wrote this book because we want people to know how transformative it is when you stop blaming other people and own it. It's possible to live a life full of peace and joy while facing the challenges life brings.

In other words, instead of being a victim, you can be victorious. Instead of life leading you, you can lead your life.

How to Use This Book

We designed this book to give you the tools that will equip you for that victory, regardless of where you are in life right now. We'll start out at the very bottom of the mountain and work our way up to acknowledging reality, accepting responsibility, and finally moving toward your goals with fresh energy and enthusiasm. At each stage of the journey from victim to victor, we'll help you understand the lay of the land, identify the obstacles you're likely to face, and share strategies, tips, and key resources you can rely on when facing setbacks and challenges. We'll also share tools to help you master each stage of the Accountability Mountain.

Together, we'll climb the path from lacking awareness to acknowledging your reality, accepting the past without letting it write your future story. Along the way, we'll share some of the challenges we've faced and the changes we've made, personally and professionally, to become more accountable in all areas of our lives. And we'll coach you through your own journey, equipping you with the skills and knowledge you need at each step to take control of your actions and behaviors in order to become truly accountable in yourself, your work, and your life. The results will transform your relationships, your

decision-making, and even how you live, giving you the power to be able to say, “I am uniquely equipped to make changes in the world.”

Sounds like a lot? It is. So we’d better get moving.

PART I

The View From Below

Like we said, we're starting this journey at the very beginning—at the bottom of the mountain. Down here, you're as far from accountability as you can possibly be. The peak is so far up in the clouds that you can't even see it, especially since, down where you are, the view is obscured by all the muck and head trash that's been clouding your perceptions. You don't know what's up there above you, and whatever it is, it feels scary and unsafe. You're pretty sure you probably can't handle it. Which is why you stay where you are, even if it sucks.

This is the perspective of a victim. Complete, total, utter powerlessness.

But while the trail ahead might look like an impossible climb, especially since you can't see where you're going, remember the old adage: a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. This first half of the book will be dedicated to getting you, single step by single step, past the muck and up above the head trash that clouds your vision. Slowly but surely, you'll climb out of the fog of obliviousness and blame and excuses and into the clean, clear light of accountability. Beginning on the very next page.

CHAPTER COME

Mountain?
What Mountain?

Nobody can hold anyone accountable. We can only do that for ourselves. However, we can be bold and honest with people in our lives so they wake up and see the opportunity for a better life if they choose the power of peak accountability.

—**ROBERT HUNT**

Robert's first experience with accountability came when he was just entering adulthood—around the same age Salem was when he experienced the story we told in the introduction. Unlike Salem, however, he had managed to make it out of high school with a diploma and was now in his first semester of college at California State University, Fullerton. The school was right in his hometown, and because there was a major state university so close to home, a lot of kids from his high school went there, including a lot of Robert's buddies.

Going to college with the same people he'd hung out with in high school made college feel almost like an extension of high school. The campus was different, the teachers were different, the classes were different, but Robert and his buddies were the same. They basically treated college like high school—that is, not especially seriously. They goofed off. They talked in class. Just like they always had.

Then one day in one of his classes, Robert and his buddies were goofing off as usual, and the professor asked them to quiet down. Maybe they didn't hear him, or maybe they just didn't take him seriously, but they kept doing whatever they were doing, and the next thing they heard was the professor snapping, "That's it! You guys, get out!"

That got their attention. They stopped and looked at the teacher, who repeated, "Get out of my class!" So they got out, went out into the courtyard and hung out, and didn't really give the whole incident much more thought.

That was on a Tuesday.

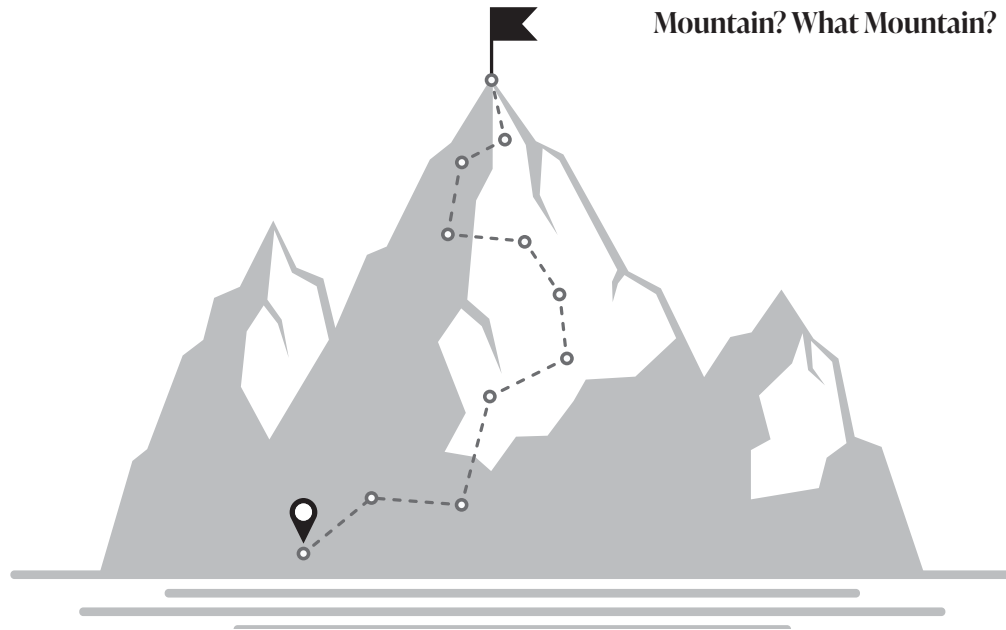
On Thursday, which was the next day the class met, Robert went back as usual and took his seat. The professor looked at him and said, "I thought I told you to get out of my class." Robert was confused. Hadn't that already happened? "I kicked you out," the teacher explained. Robert's response?

"That was Tuesday."

The professor looked at him and said, "Boy, this is *college*. When you're kicked out, you're kicked out." Robert just stared at him. "Nobody cares if you go to college!" the professor went on, exasperated. "I don't care. Your parents don't care. You want to go to college, go to college. You don't, don't go. But *don't* be in my class!"

Robert had been caught completely off guard. It was humiliating. He looked like a complete idiot in front of everyone. Nobody had ever told him that if he mouthed off in class, he could be permanently kicked out. Just like nobody'd ever told Salem that if he blew off half of his AP English work, he might not graduate.

He was trapped at the bottom of the mountain, at the very, very lowest stage of accountability—lack of awareness.



You Are Here

When you're at the Lack of Awareness stage of the journey, you don't even know there is a mountain to climb (hence the title of this chapter). You have little to no idea where you are or how you got there, let alone how you can possibly get out. You live your life doing what you think you have to do, because what choice do you have? You're stuck, and you feel you have no power to change it. You're a victim—of circumstances, of your own lack of understanding ... of life, basically.

This is the “nobody told me” phase of accountability. Or the “I didn't know” phase. When you have an “accountability moment” like Robert did in this phase, your responses are usually about your obliviousness to the situation that “caused” your problem. How can it be your fault if you didn't know about it in the first place?

As you've gone through life, you've probably discovered a lot of things “nobody told you.” But the reality is that somebody probably did tell you at some point. It's not like nobody ever told Robert that his actions might have consequences. It's just that he hadn't experi-