next level LEADER™ PROGRAM

THE RULES OF STRUCTURE GUIDE

DEFINING TERMS:

Three words I use in a very specific way when discussing structure. Let me define them before moving ahead. These words are often conflated or used interchangeably, which can be the source of structural problems.

Authority: The power to approve a direction, make a decision, or take an action.

Accountability: The person ultimately held to account for the *outcome* or *result*. This isn't always the person doing the *actions* that lead to the result.

Responsibility: The person who is doing the *actions*. This person owns the initiation, execution, or follow through of a particular action, process, or task.

RULES OF STRUCTURE:

With these terms defined in this way, one of the best ways to remove conflict and strife between people in a system and improve productivity is to check and see if our structure is keeping the following principles.

1) **Authority and Responsibility Can Be Separated**
   Authority is the power to approve or make final decisions. Responsibility is an assignment to oversee, initiate, or complete tasks. These are not always the same thing.

   Sometimes a person is both responsible for a project and has the final authority to make a decision or take an action. For example, a CFO may be responsible for initiating and overseeing the budget process in a company, and also have the final authority to approve the overall amount allocated for each department.

Sometimes a person can be responsible for initiating and taking an action to completion but, they do not have the authority to make a final decision or approve an action. For example, you could have a VP of Marketing who is responsible for initiating a branding process, vetting marketing agencies, and delivering brand options for consideration, but the CEO has final authority on deciding what the brand is.

2) **Accountability and Responsibility Can be Separated**
   A person can be responsible for an action and accountable for completing that task, but they may not be accountable for the outcome of the task.

   For example, an executive assistant may be responsible for booking a meeting and sending an invitation. But they are not accountable for running the meeting or having people show up to the meeting or any of the outcomes of the meeting.

3) **Match Authority and Accountability**
   If authority is the power to make decisions, you want to be sure that a person has the power to make decisions on what they are accountable for. In this case, I use accountability to describe outcomes, not actions. I may not be the one taking the action, that could be a direct report, but I am still accountable for the outcome. The one taking the action has responsibility, not accountability.

   I had a client who was promoted to oversee a very large project. He was told he was accountable for a long list of outcomes. The only problem is, he was not given the authority to manage the people involved. They were in a different department and reported to a different boss. Ultimately, this created a great deal of strain in the system. Be careful not to make someone *accountable* for things they have no power or *authority* to affect. Nor do you want to give someone *authority* over something they are not held *accountable* for.

4) **Avoid Having Multiple People with Equal Authority in the Same Area**
   It is most helpful to give final authority to a single person on various decisions rather than groups of people. This helps avoid gridlock, needless conflict, and bottlenecking in the system. In the case of boards, partnerships, or organization-wide decisions, which cut across the accountabilities and responsibilities of multiple team members, this is not possible or advisable. You will have to content with