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Accountability Drives Success

In my 30 years' experience as a senior leader and in working with my clients, I know that accountability is critical to making progress and achieving outcomes. And multiple research studies agree.

Not convinced?

Just think about any of the frameworks, models or processes that you use with your team or in your organization – whether that's Lean, Agile, your meeting protocols, KPIs, OKRs or the latest transformational change program. Without accountability they become meaningless and ineffective.

It's like flushing water down a drain – a waste of valuable resources.

Time and time again I've seen a lack of accountability cause problems with collaboration and cross functional teams, create low levels of morale, trust and engagement, drive a talent drain through frustration with confused expectations and poor management practices, and impact results through a lack of alignment around key priorities and desired outcomes.

There's no doubt in my mind that accountability is the foundation for purposeful progress and high performance. And in the COVID-impacted world of work it's more important than ever.

The imperative for accountability is real and present, and to meet it we're going to need a reset – An Accountability Reset.

Read more to find out how.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paige". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping 'P' and a long horizontal line extending from the end.

If we weren't good at it before (and let's face it most of us weren't), the added complexity of the COVID-impacted workforce and workplace can make accountability feel even harder, as workplaces and workers try to get their heads, hearts, and hands around what the 'new normal' looks like. And despite the promise of widespread vaccine distribution, the ongoing challenge of managing local outbreaks means that disruption and uncertainty will be part of the workplace landscape for most of 2021, if not beyond.

**Disruption and uncertainty
will be part of the workplace landscape for most of 2021**

That's not to say there weren't positives from our COVID experiences of 2020. Many of us are eager to hold onto some of the freedoms and new perspectives that it brought - more family time, less commuting, and a clearer understanding who and what are important to us. In fact, the thought of battling into the office and returning to the 'old routine' fills many of us with dread. A recent Wellbeing Lab survey found that only 39% of workers in Australia felt positively about returning to their workplace.

All the CEOs and senior leaders I work with are expecting a partially distributed workforce to become their new operating normal.

A partially distributed workforce is the new operating normal

**As the challenges and opportunities provided by COVID increase,
so does the need to perform.**

Organizations that didn't take care of their people by being flexible in their expectations as workers managed the demands of home-schooling or offering support to those who were alone in isolation, face an engagement and talent flight risk in the coming months. Equally, those teams and businesses that were able to provide great customer service despite the chaos and uncertainty, won the hearts, minds and loyalty of clients.

**Sustaining purposeful progress and high performance in the
COVID context is critical**

This is The Accountability Imperative

An Accountability Crisis?

“We just need people to be more accountable.”

It's a phrase I often hear from the leaders I work with.

Have you said or thought it recently?

The problem is, when leaders say this, their people hear 'you're not doing enough' or 'you're letting me down'. And that's because accountability is what's discussed when things are going wrong rather than setting things up for success from the start. It's this punitive view of Accountability that holds leaders, teams and organizations back from boosting progress and performance.

And this is a real problem, because research* suggests that when organizations get accountability wrong:



The consequence is poor results, failed initiatives, missed targets, low morale and engagement and an environment with more blame than trust.

Things get worse without anyone knowing why or accepting the accountability to do something about it.

*Workplace Accountability Study, 2014

Research also shows that team members see the way leaders behave as the single most important influencing factor on accountability in their workplace.

Unfortunately, many leaders are stuck in a neurologically and psychologically outdated set of beliefs that makes asking for accountability whilst navigating uncertainty harder than it needs to be.

The result is that leaders are struggling to step up to The Accountability Imperative.

These are some of the issues that I see leaders are grappling with:

Accountability conversations are hard - and even harder when they're virtual.

Workers' priorities and expectations of work and life have changed and what was ok before, is less ok now.

Returning to the workplace holds genuine fear of exposure for some people.
How do leaders navigate that sensitively?

A distributed workforce feels harder to manage - more time, effort and energy required

The impact of COVID on the wellbeing of workers means leaders feel less able to ask for 'more'.

It's harder to engage people in a virtual environment and to get a read their mindsets, attitudes and behaviours.

Accountability Issues

In my own leadership experience and in working with my clients, I see three main issues with accountability:

1. Confusion

One of the biggest challenges with accountability is that it means different things to different people, often in the same organization and even in the same team.

How consistent is the understanding of accountability in your organization?

2. Concern

Accountability is often only asked for once things have gone wrong - the conversation comes too late, people are defensive, and it can feel hard to do them well.

How confident do you feel having accountability conversations?

3. Context

Leaders are unsure how to embed accountability into the culture of their teams and the organization so that it becomes a normal part of how work gets done.

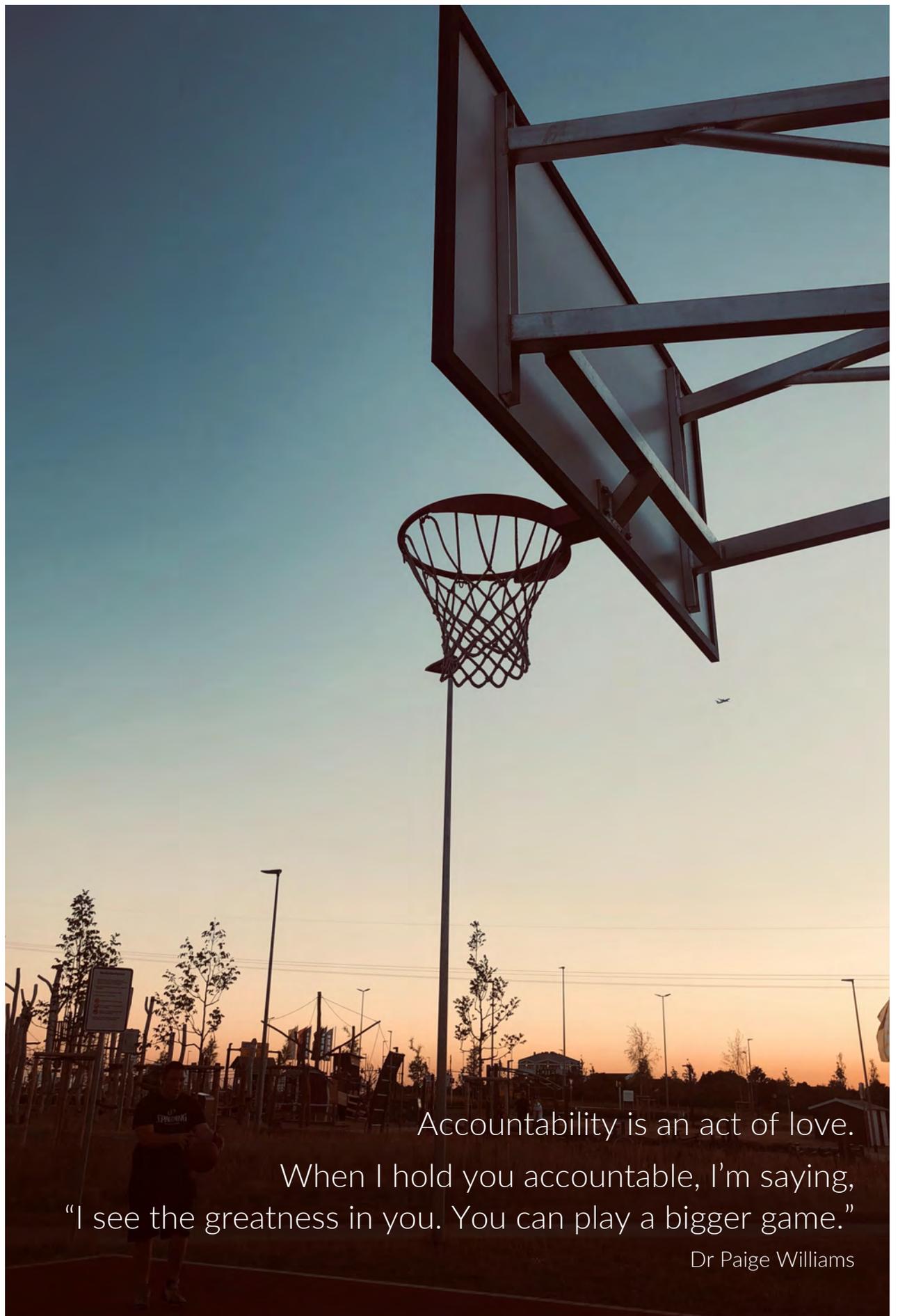
Is accountability part of your team culture?

The reality is that studies consistently find that leaders are **the most** significant factor in shaping levels of accountability, progress and performance.

The reality is also that a lack of accountability makes leaders, teams and organisations fragile in the face of uncertainty and disruption.

We need create new mindsets, attitudes and behaviours so that leaders role model and feel confident to coach and create cultures of accountability.

We need an Accountability Reset



Accountability is an act of love.
When I hold you accountable, I'm saying,
"I see the greatness in you. You can play a bigger game."

Dr Paige Williams

The Accountability Reset

Research suggests that accountability is fueled by two factors and as I work with leaders across business, education, government and not-for-profit organisations, I see the same.

They are:

1. The **quality** of Accountability Relationships
2. The **clarity** of Accountability Expectations

QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS: From Barren to Fruitful

Barren accountability relationships are based in fear and so lack trust and safety. As a result, people 'muddle through' rather than ask for help, hide mistakes and defend under-performance.

The result is drama, stress and a lack of learning, progress and performance.

Fruitful accountability relationships have high levels of trust and psychological safety. People feel able to ask for help and support when needed and communicate clearly, regularly and honestly about their progress.

Growth, development and progress are made, and good outcomes follow.

CLARITY OF EXPECTATIONS: From Confused to Clear

When **accountability expectations are confused**, any one or more of the why, how, what, who, when and so what factors may be unclear. Whilst confusion in any one factor will have a slightly different impact, the overall effect is the same – more stress, drama and waste, and less progress, engagement and performance.

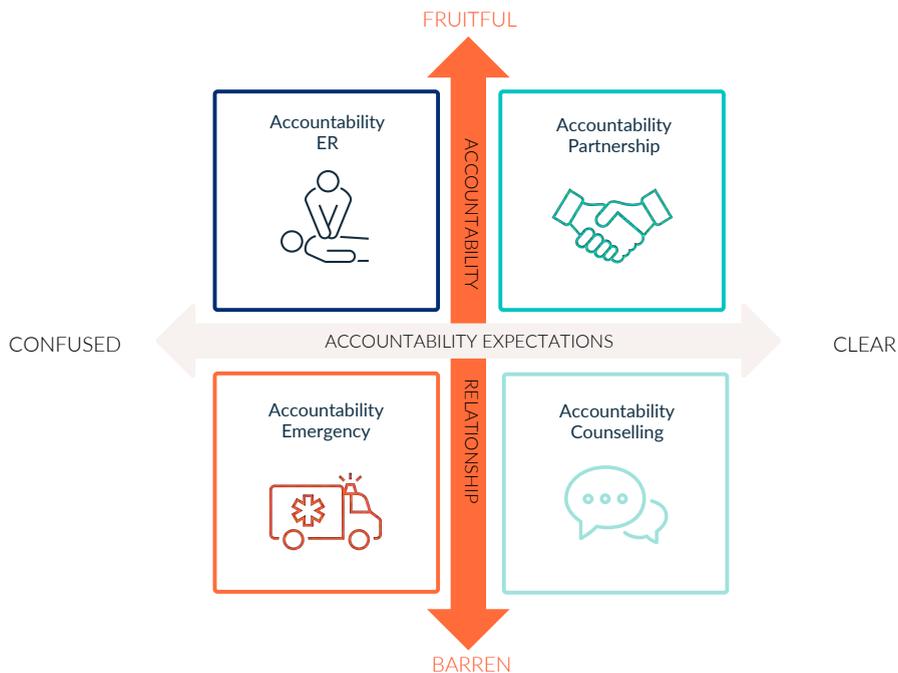
When **accountability expectations are clear**, people understand why they are doing the work and how it

fits into a 'bigger picture'; what exactly needs to be done and by whom; when it needs to be done by and what the consequences are if it isn't – for them and the wider context. They also need to know what the progress markers are and how these will be reported and reviewed. This level of clarity provides a sense of safety and control which means people feel confident in what they are being asked to deliver.

**We reset accountability through
the quality of accountability relationships and
the clarity of accountability expectations**

Diagnosing Accountability Issues

Understanding how the two fuel factors for accountability interact can help us diagnose the cause of accountability issues and recognize how we might address them.



ACCOUNTABILITY EMERGENCY

Accountability expectations are confused, and the barren relationship means there is little possibility that people will reach out for the help or support that could improve the situation. The focus is inwards, on staying safe and playing small.

This is a black hole for accountability and a pit for progress and performance that requires swift and significant action.



ACCOUNTABILITY ER

Accountability expectations are confused but the relationship may be quite fruitful. Clarity could be increased through the right conversations, however, there is a risk of returning to an Accountability Emergency if the confusion goes on for too long and causes frustration that impacts the quality of relationship.

There is likely to be limited progress and under-performance here, but – like a patient in the ER - it can be saved given the right treatment.



ACCOUNTABILITY COUNSELLING

Accountability expectations are clear, but the relationship is barren. There is a fragility to this situation that may be tested when problems arise. Things rarely go according to plan, and this is when the quality of the accountability relationship makes a difference through the trust and psychological safety that support honest conversations about issues before they develop and enable collective problem solving to resolve them.

There is performance and progress potential here if the relationship can be nurtured and developed.



ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNERSHIP

Accountability relationships are fruitful and expectations are clear. This is a true Accountability Partnership. People can question expectations, ask for support to fulfill them if needed and feel confident in flagging issues as they arise. Reviews and progress check-ins are agreed, regular and transparent, and people take personal ownership for their accountability expectations. The focus is outwards, with a mindset of contribution and an understanding that 'what I do matters to the progress that we make together'.

This is where peak progress and performance lives.

The Accountability Matrix can help us identify the cause of our current accountability challenges and recognize the action we can take to support peak performance and progress.

What insight does the Accountability Matrix provide for you?

Accountability is not just a question of nature or nurture.
Accountability is a mindset that can be developed.

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Leading The Accountability Reset

A lack of accountability is holding leaders, teams and organisations back. It's limiting progress and fueling underperformance and it's making us fragile as we navigate the uncertainty and disruption of a COVID-impacted world of work.

Leaders who lead The Accountability Reset understand that it will strengthen relationships, encourage learning, and support purposeful progress and high performance. They move beyond fear and harness the Accountability Imperative to develop fruitful relationships based on confidence, trust and safety. They create clear expectations that enable people take meaningful and effective action to benefit themselves, their team and their workplace.

Are you ready?

The good news is that resetting accountability doesn't have to be difficult, expensive or time-consuming. Small shifts in mindsets, attitudes and leader practices can have a big impact on levels of accountability, progress and performance.

Which is why my evidence-based **Accountability Reset Toolkit** focuses on actions that leaders can easily integrate into their existing practices to build accountability for themselves, their team members and beyond, and build their confidence to lead The Accountability Reset.

If you'd like to talk about how I can help you, your leaders or your organization have an Accountability Reset, [simply click here to book a time for us to talk.](#)

The Accountability Reset Toolkit

The good news is that creating fruitful accountability relationships and clear accountability expectations doesn't have to be difficult, expensive or time-consuming. Small shifts in mindsets, attitudes and leader practices can have a big impact on levels of accountability, progress and performance.

And that's why my evidence-based Leaders Accountability Reset Toolkit focuses on actions that leaders can easily integrate into their existing practices to build accountability for themselves, their team members and beyond. This simple design makes it easier for leaders to experiment and build their confidence to lead The Accountability Reset.

ACCOUNTABILITY MINDSET



Be the Change...

How moving from Expectation to Ownership and Judgement to Curiosity builds fruitful relationships that invite conversations and possibilities not seen before.

ACCOUNTABILITY CONVERSATIONS



Coach the Change...

How setting clear expectations helps leaders recognise low and high accountability team members and coach them up or coach them out.

ACCOUNTABILITY CULTURE



Change the Context...

How, by role modelling an accountability mindset and using the routines, rituals and rhythms of your team, leaders can craft a context in which accountability is the cultural norm.

The Toolkit in Action



WITH YOU

Accountability Reset Coaching – With the right tools and support, practice and feedback, you can lead The Accountability Reset. I excel in helping leaders by translating the latest evidence from studies in neuroscience, psychology and leadership into small, daily leadership practices that can be sustained – no matter how busy or disruptive work gets.

[Click here to contact me to find out more and chat about your coaching goals.](#)

WITH YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

Accountability Reset Training – My Accountability Reset Masterclass series is designed to engage, inspire and invigorate your leaders as they explore The Accountability Reset Toolkit and discuss how it can be applied to the challenges and opportunities they face.

Delivered in a structure and format to meet your needs, there are no bystanders or passive observers in these masterclasses, which blend classroom learning, real world experiments, and coaching to quickly build the knowledge, skills and support that leaders need to lead The Accountability Reset - even in the face of uncertainty.

[Click here to book a time for us to talk about what this could look like for your leaders.](#)



ACROSS YOUR ORGANISATION

Accountability Reset Keynote Speaking Workshops – Expand and extend awareness of The Accountability Reset and Toolkit through in-person or virtual keynote speaking workshops. I combine playful humour with a meaningful message, streetwise smarts with evidence-based data and deliver it in a way that feels like dinner (or lunch) -table conversation. A powerful blend of education and entertainment, my keynote workshops will leave people feeling energized, engaged and clear on the action they can take to engage with The Accountability Reset.

[Click here for us to discuss an agenda for your keynote workshop](#)



About Dr Paige Williams

Determined to help leaders move beyond just the need for resilience to become AntiFragile, Paige Williams, PhD helps leaders understand how to feel well, do well and lead well so that they can benefit from the dynamic, complex, and uncertain environment in which most organisations operate.

An Honorary Fellow of the Centre for Positive Psychology at the University of Melbourne and an Associate of Melbourne Business School, Paige uses a potent blend of positive psychology, neuroscience, leadership research, and her 30+ years of international business leadership experience to provide practical, evidence-based pathways to help leaders and organisations thrive through change.



You can find out more about Paige's work at www.drpaigewilliams.com.

In her own words...

I am passionate about leveraging leadership capacity.

Through my coaching, mentoring, keynote speaking and leadership development programs I help leaders replace fear with confidence and confusion with clarity to create purposeful progress and high performance for themselves and the people they lead. I have worked with hundreds of leaders in business, government, NGOs, and education, including Specsavers, APA, Maroondah City Council, the Magistrates Court of Victoria, the Transport Accident Commission, and the University of Melbourne.

A combination of real-life leadership experience and deep academic knowledge fuels my 'superpower' of translating complex ideas and the latest academic research to make them real, relevant, and relatable to the work that leaders do every day.

My commercial experience is broad and deep, and my knowledge of leadership more than theoretical. Having spent over 30 years in international leadership roles, I know what it's like to be a leader. This experience, supported by an undergraduate degree in business and post-graduate studies in organisational change, led to my doctoral research examining how to create positive change and wellbeing in organisations. I continue to research and teach as an Honorary Fellow of the Centre for Positive Psychology and an Associate of Melbourne Business School at the University of Melbourne.

I love to share my work and have presented at conferences internationally and published in a range of academic and non-academic journals, including *Psychology Today* and *Human Resource Management*. I've also been interviewed for a variety of [media](#), including television, radio and a variety of podcasts, and I write a regular [blog](#).

I truly believe that leadership is the most potent leverage point we have to create positive change in any system, be it a family, a school, an organisation, or any team.

**And I believe that each of us has a capacity for leadership
that we have yet to realise.**

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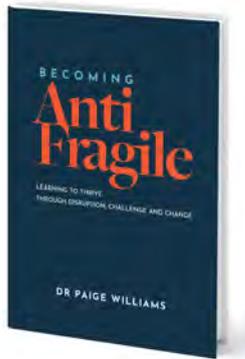
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The Accountability Reset

Want more?



Becoming AntiFragile: Learning to Thrive through Disruption, Challenge and Change

Help your leaders to embrace change rather than resist it, to lean into challenge rather than avoid it, and to learn to thrive when times get tough. Packed with practical guiding principles based on the latest research in neuroscience, psychology and leadership this book gives leaders everything they need to become antifragile.

[Click here to order your copy](#)

"I've stepped into this book after a role redundancy and a very hectic start to 2020 (as have many of us). I love the pivotal question this book challenges me to keep asking 'how can I come out of this better than I went into it?'. How can I improve myself through this period and through this challenging period globally and find ways to continue to grow (not just bounce back!) Great timing. Great guidance. Great read."

Nick W – Amazon Review

The AntiFragile Survey

Take the free AntiFragile Survey and in less than 10 minutes, you'll be able to safely and confidentially:

- find out where you are on the AntiFragile continuum and how you can use my ROBUST principles framework to remove fragility and Become AntiFragile;
- immediately see your results – including your levels of AntiFragile Energy, Attitudes and Mindsets and the impact this is having for your wellbeing and performance;
- download your personalised results report packed with tips and questions to help guide your Becoming AntiFragile journey

[You can take the AntiFragile Survey by clicking here.](#)

"This is such a great tool that not only provides insights into our current levels of antifragility as a leader, but importantly personalised tips to build our capacity to thrive in times of uncertainty and challenge."

Vanessa, Senior Leader, Corporate Finance



Research, Ideas and Resources

Learn more about my research and ideas and receive access to exclusive resources by signing up to my regular (but not too frequent!) newsletter, *Leverage Points*. This is my latest thinking, reading, research and resources straight to your Inbox.

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