

Stories about **LEADERSHIP**

A STORY ABOUT TAKING RESPONSIBILITY



The flaw is minor. No dramatic accident, no headline news. More like a quiet crack that only becomes visible when you look closely and suddenly realize it's been there for a while.

I see it on the shift schedule even before I've properly had my coffee. On Tuesdays and Wednesdays, station 3 is staffed with only one experienced worker – right in the middle of the new component's start-up phase. I did the planning myself last week. I remember thinking: It'll be fine. We'll get through this.

It is now Tuesday, 8:10 a.m., and reality is contained in two pallets of rejects in the side aisle.

Marco comes to me, the report in his hand. He's not angry. That makes it worse.

"Florian, that was foreseeable. The new players aren't safe there yet. I said so."

I feel my body immediately want to go on the defensive. Not aggressively, more reflexively: to explain, justify, categorize. High sick leave rate, more orders than planned, no reserves. Everything checks out. And yet, the result of my planning is real.

I can already hear myself formulating the sentence: You know how things are right now. And remember that this very sentence erodes trust.

That same morning, the production manager arrives in the hall. He stops at the whiteboard and looks at the reject rate.

"Florian, we're 14 percent above target. What's going on?"

His tone is calm. And that's precisely what makes it difficult. Anger would be easier. Anger can be absorbed. Quiet disappointment goes straight to the gut.

"We had some short-term absences," I begin. "The sickness rate—"

He holds up his hand. "I know the background. I want to know what you're doing."

I briefly feel that unpleasant buzzing inside me: If I take this on now, I'll appear weak. A voice from old leadership models.

Beside her, a second voice, quieter but clearer. The coach's sentence, which she once said to me almost casually: "Responsibility is not an admission of guilt. Responsibility is the decision to take control of the situation again."

I swallow. "I'll come this morning with a plan," I say.

He nods, without another word. And leaves.

12:30. I call the team together briefly. Not a big meeting, just "a minute." Their faces are tired from the shift work, some are annoyed because they suspect it's about pressure. I understand their expectations. They've seen often enough that mistakes are passed down the line.

I stand where everyone can see me. My heart is beating fast. Not because I don't know what I want to say. But because I know what it will cost.

"I want to make something clear," I begin. "This week's shift schedule was my decision. I understaffed Ward 3. That was a mistake. And the disciplinary action is the consequence of that." Silence.

No outrage. More like a moment of discernment, wondering whether it's real or just a statement.

I can bear the gaze.

"We'll change that immediately," I say. "Starting tomorrow, I'll put Jonas on ward 3 as the second experienced staff member. I'll personally handle the onboarding process for the new staff today. We'll go through the critical steps together to restore confidence."

A few shoulders slump. Not all of them. But some.

"We're building a fixed buffer into the plan for the next ramp-up phases," I continued. "And I want you to tell me early on where you see risks. Not to criticize me, but so we can plan better. If we keep quiet about such things, we'll end up paying for them twice."

Marco nods curtly. No praise. But an end to the harshness. That's something, too.

As everyone disperses, he pauses briefly. "It's good that you said so."

I exhale. "I should have seen it sooner."

"It happens," he says. "The important thing is that you don't brush it aside."

His statement resonates with me because he's right. I used to often try to downplay mistakes so as not to unsettle anyone. But talking things away is far more unsettling.

In the afternoon, I'm at station 3 myself. I go through every critical hand movement with the new recruits. Not as a heroine. More as part of the solution. I see their nervousness. I also see them breathe a sigh of relief because there's someone there who isn't scolding, but guiding.

At 4 p.m., I send the production manager a short email. No long explanation, no excuses. Three bullet points: Error identified. Immediate action. Learning objective. I think of the phrase I hear again and again in coaching: Transparency is not a weakness. It is the foundation of trust.

When I walk through the hall in the evening, the side aisle is empty. The rejected pallets have been removed. Not because the problem is solved – that will take time – but because we are able to operate again.

Taking responsibility isn't pleasant. But it's clean. And cleanliness in the system is sometimes the only way back to leadership.



Takeaway inspiration

Taking responsibility

Taking responsibility means not explaining or blaming mistakes, but making them transparent and immediately translating them into corrective and learning steps. This builds trust because people sense that there is no cover-up, but rather effective leadership.

If something has gone wrong, first formulate a sentence along the lines of: "That was my decision/my part." Only then do you explain the background. This one sentence determines whether trust grows or shrinks.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS ABOUT TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOURSELF

1. Where do I currently sense a mistake or an oversight that I am still downplaying?
2. What do I fear if I openly take on responsibility?
3. What visible corrective and learning action can I initiate today?



Feel free to contact me anytime::

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