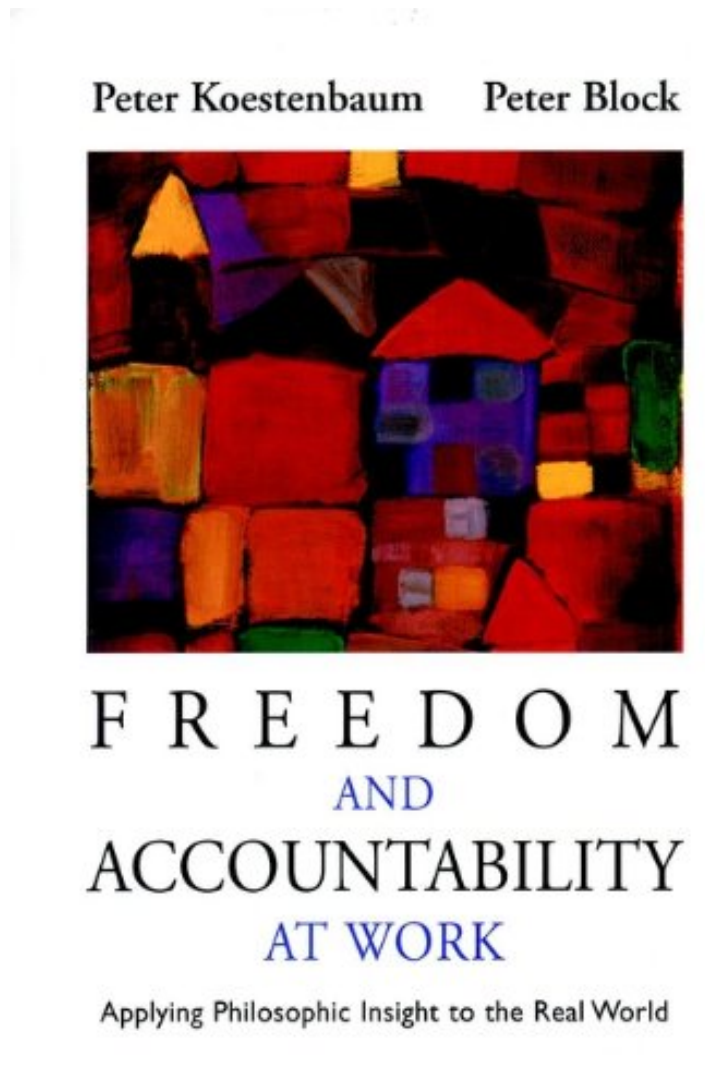


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# Freedom and Accountability at Work: Applying Philosophic Insight to the Real World

*Peter Koestenbaum, Peter Block*

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**Peter Koestenbaum, Peter Block : Freedom and Accountability at Work: Applying Philosophic Insight to the Real World** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Freedom and Accountability at Work: Applying Philosophic Insight to the Real World:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Freedom and Accountability at WorkBy -\_Tim\_-Freedom and Accountability at Work, by Peter Koestenbaum and Peter Block, applies existentialist philosophy to workplace issues, reaching some profound and perhaps surprising conclusions. The mention of "existentialist philosophy" makes the book sound abstruse, but it is actually concrete and experience-based. The authors make three main points.1. Humans

are free; their acts are acts of choice. With this understanding, we realize that "employees do not have to be motivated" and "rewards do not explain and drive behavior." (pp. 104 and 105) But people often try to hide or escape from their freedom, because freedom entails responsibility, which leads to anxiety and guilt. A manager might then choose to (sensitively) confront employees with the fact of their freedom.<sup>2</sup> "Negative" experiences or emotions are what give meaning to life. For example:- Anxiety is not an aberration or something to be avoided: it is an integral part of the life of a complete human being. Humans are free to choose, but they cannot be certain that they have made the right choices, and therefore they experience anxiety. Anxiety tells us that something important is at stake, and if we felt no anxiety our lives would have no meaning.- Guilt is inevitable, as everyone--sometimes--makes choices that are inconsistent with their own values. Neurotic guilt is not inevitable but arises when people violate a set of social values that they cannot comply with.- We must experience death: the death of others, and the anticipation of our own death. In work settings, failures, firings, and organizational collapse are experienced as symbolic deaths. It is hard for people to accept that organizations and their own positions have finite lives, so they expect leaders to disguise these facts through confident posturing and language.- We must experience evil. It is through our response to evil (which may take the form of ignorance, weakness, injustice, etc.) that we discover purpose and destiny.<sup>3</sup> Through our freedom, we create the world that we live in; this creative power is what it means to be created in God's image. But it is uncomfortable to recognize our responsibility: "We institutionally deny the fact that each of us--though our actions and our view of the world--is creating the organization and the leadership we are so fond of complaining about. Deciding that I have created the world around me--and therefore I am the one to fix it--is the ultimate act of accountability." (p. 26)The use of philosophical terms makes this book challenging, at times, but the exposition is first rate.<sup>24</sup> of 24 people found the following review helpful. Get this book in your library asap!By David CoxKoestenbaum and Block have put together a book that is head and shoulders above anything I have read in the leadership domain in a long time. This is a book with deep penetrating messages that go to the very heart of what it means to be a human being and to bring our authentic selves to the workplace. It's obvious that Koestenbaum has played a major role in Block's philosophical underpinnings as a management consultant. The two scholars share a special bond and admiration for one another that make for a special book.The book is organized into four parts with Block introducing each part followed by chapters that are adaptations of Koestenbaum's 1970's writings on existential philosophy. Then Block wraps up each part with implications for the workplace in general and for leadership in particular. What makes this book so special is its attention to the fundamental issues of human existence: freedom (free will) and accountability (responsibility) (Part I), anxiety (Part II), death and evil (Part III), and guilt (Part IV). The concepts are integrated into what they call "philosophic insight" that make for fully human organizations. Koestenbaum concludes the book with a summation, reminiscence, and glossary.This is a book that spoke to me on both a personal level and as a professional educator. The insights are profound and get to the core issues of leadership. My hunch is it will be a classic. This is a book I will savor and read over and over again for many years to come. I will recommend it to others, as I am doing now, every chance I get.<sup>26</sup> of 27 people found the following review helpful. What it means to be humanBy P. LembergThis book is tough sledding, and it is not for everybody. However, if you are willing to work your way through it, authors Koestenbaum and Block offer a few terrific and hugely powerful insights.Freedom and Accountability is a curious and rare piece of writing - existentialist philosophy applied to the world of work. The authors are concerned with issues such as choice and free will, accountability and responsibility, and what it means to be an authentic human being - critical issues as the industrial era hierarchical workplace evolves into something new.Plus - here's the gem - they assert that it is only by acknowledging and internalizing the fragility of life, and the immediacy and totality of death - that one finally stops wasting one's time, ceases doing things which do not matter, and becomes truly empowered.And here's an interesting idea: they further assert that anxiety - that near-universal feeling most of us seek to avoid - is really the stuff that makes us feel alive, and it is a direct result of our exercise of free will. The only people without anxiety are either doing nothing important - taking no risks, or are totally repressed.This book resonated with my own work as an executive coach, speaker and strategist,. And I liked it a lot. I find it helpful to read words which express my own thoughts with greater clarity than I had previously.These ideas may also feel familiar to students of Landmark Education and Werner Erhardt - they have similar roots in the writings of philosophers Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger.

Peter Koestenbaum and Peter Block offer you a new perspective for viewing the workplace through the lens of philosophy so that you may have a better understanding of how to reclaim your freedom and accountability and encourage the same in others. They provide a radical new approach to your work-a-day life that will bring true meaning and power to your work. Freedom and Accountability at Work offers you the information you need to: \* Gain strength and meaning by transforming your thinking on how you view anxiety, doubt, death, and guilt \* Find new ways to bring spiritual and ethical values into your workplace \* Engage in profound change that will help you overcome cynicism that comes from superficial change \* Replace your loss of organizational loyalty and safety with a sense of freedom and accountability "Both Koestenbaum and Block are such passionate men who bring together what we all seek in our work life-meaning, insight, and humanness. Bless them for this book." --Joyce DeShano, board

From Booklist Koestenbaum is a philosophy professor and veteran writer, and coauthor Block is a business consultant and a longtime friend of Koestenbaum's. This book, a product of their professional affiliation, is a "restatement" of two important books of Koestenbaum's, *The Vitality of Death* (1971) and *The New Image of the Person* (1978). Both books were academically oriented, and Block has taken their messages and retooled them for a more popular audience. The fundamental point of the new book is that the basic tenets of philosophy can be applied to life, particularly to the workplace, to such an extent that our lives can be changed. The primary focus is on the concept of individual freedom and how managers can best utilize that concept to create a more productive, but at the same time more humane, work environment. This provocative, challenging book is not easy reading. It must be taken in small doses, for each idea requires time to digest. Brad Hooper Copyright copy; American Library Association. All rights reserved "Both Koestenbaum and Block are such passionate men who bring together what we all seek in our work life-meaning, insight, and humanness. Bless them for this book." (Joyce DeShano, board chair, Ascension Health) "Peter Koestenbaum's message of courage and accountability in the face of anxiety has struck a powerful chord. He and Peter Block have helped us see the very core of our contribution-compassionately confront people with their own freedom." (Kenneth F. Murphy, senior vice president, human resources, Philip Morris USA) "Prepare to have your world rocked. Koestenbaum and Block take on the profound task of understanding existence and its place in organizations. You will never be the same." (Christopher G. Worley, director, MSOD Program, Pepperdine University) "This book deepens the ongoing economic and social dialogue about balancing wealth creation with core human values. The authors' words offer encouragement to people in organizations who choose to elevate their work by using it as a vehicle to discover and strengthen the links between identity and industry, passion and prosperity, meaning and marketability, service and success." (Joseph A. Braidish, director, Kelley Executive Partners, Indiana University Kelley School of Business) "Peter Koestenbaum brings the full force of his intellectual prowess to bear on the major questions of human existence. His insights are priceless even as they challenge some of our most deeply held assumptions about organizational life." (Camden C. Danielson, executive director, Kelley Executive Partners, Indiana University) "This work is one of those rare business book breaks from the 'how to?to the what if?'. Block and Koestenbaum provide the foundation for a philosophy of hope for the work place for life; adding meaning to both." (Howard Schultz, cofounder, The Learning Consortium) "This book is for the curious and the courageous. The curious will learn from a master philosopher and be intellectually challenged. The courageous will be asked to choose freedom and accountability. Be forewarned!" (Charlotte Roberts, author, *Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, *The Dance of Change*) "Tired of being held? and holding others?accountable? Disappointed that your time management system didn't reduce your stress? Think freedom in the workplace is an oxymoron? Then get ready to go deep, and emerge yourself in the wisdom of Koestenbaum according to Block." (Paul Anderson, dean, Northern California School for Managing and Leading Change) "I've taught Peter Koestenbaum's leadership philosophy all over the world...and it works! Its broad and all encompassing...and brings a powerful message of hope to us in the workplace." (George I. Fitzpatrick, *The Authentic Leader*, teacher and practitioner) "This is an important book by two important management thinkers. Peter Koestenbaum and Peter Block offer an alternative, if not an antidote, to the shallowness of 'speed, simplicity and (unwarranted) self-confidence' by challenging managers to think about freedom and accountability." (Robert M. Fulmer, coauthor, *The Leadership Investment*, Distinguished Visiting Professor Graziadio School of Business, Pepperdine University) "Noted philosopher Peter Koestenbaum and author Peter Block present some new perspectives for seekers of meaning, insight and humanity in the work place." (Training, 12/01) "It's perceptions are strikingly original, challenging the reader on every page to speculate and transform." (Napra , 1/02) "Koestenbaum and Block present more in-depth information on philosophical tenets and do an outstanding job of helping readers see how to apply the ideas." (Choice, 2/02) "...it provides deep an valuable insight..." (Professional Manager, March 2002) "It belongs on your retail shelves and also in your backroom to be read and shared with employees." (New Age Retailer, May/June 2002)From the Inside FlapWe live in organizations that are more interested in controlling and predicting behavior than understanding it. We view freedom as a problem to be managed rather than the essence of all motivation and creativity. If we can deepen our understanding of what it means to be a human being, we can become leaders who discover and create meaning no matter where we work or what we do for a living. *Freedom and Accountability at Work* is a provocative book on leadership and the workplace that celebrates leadership as a challenge in philosophical reflection as opposed to a set of behaviors and skills to be honed for success. Written in collaboration by noted philosophy professor Peter Koestenbaum and renowned business consultant Peter Block, *Freedom and Accountability at Work* is a leading-edge and practical book that draws on the co-authors' combined wisdom and expertise. Koestenbaum and Block offer you a new way of thinking about effective leadership. They present a deeper understanding of how to handle the most difficult of human emotions including uncertainty, anxiety, guilt, and anger. These subjective realities of each of our lives can become our allies and sources of strength if we view them from a philosophical viewpoint. Throughout the book, the authors make constructive suggestions for overcoming the feelings of helplessness and isolation that are a product of our technology-dominant culture. *Freedom and Accountability at*

Work reveals how you can make the transition from a science- and psychology-based view of the world to an understanding based on philosophy and the search for meaning and ethics. The authors emphasize the power and value of deepening your appreciation, even changing your mind, about what it means to be human in a world that is driven by speed, technology, and quick-fix solutions. Integrating the wisdom and insights in *Freedom and Accountability at Work* into your everyday life can help bring meaning, purpose, and hope to your ever-changing and often chaotic world.

**THE AUTHORS** Peter Koestenbaum was a professor of philosophy at San Jose State University for thirty-four years. He has applied his knowledge of philosophy to business, leadership, management, marketing, and strategic thinking. He is the author of *Leadership; The Inner Side of Greatness, Is There an Answer to Death?, Managing Anxiety, Choosing to Love, The Heart of Business, The New Image of the Person, and The Vitality of Death*. Koestenbaum and Block are the co-creators of the videotape *The Language of the Leadership Diamond*. Peter lives in Westlake Village, California. Peter Block, author, consultant, and speaker, has worked for more than thirty years with governments, businesses, and communities worldwide to bring service and accountability to a wide range of organizations and groups. Peter is the founder of two renowned training firms, *Designed Learning* and *Block Petrella Weisbord*. He is the author of *The Flawless Consulting Fieldbook and Companion, Flawless Consulting, Stewardship, The Empowered Manager* and *The Answer to How Is Yes* (2001). Block's office is in Mystic, Connecticut.