What We Should Have Known

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A staff member, who reported to me, had messed up; and I was explaining the situation to my boss. To lessen my responsibility, I said something like, "I didn't know." The immediate response from my superior was, "If you didn't know, you should have known." In retrospect this rebuke was spot on. In fact, I've stolen this response several times when I dealt with colleagues.

King Solomon pointed this out when he wrote, "Don't excuse yourself by saying, 'Look, we didn't know.' For God understands all hearts, and he sees you. He who guards your soul knows you knew. He will repay all people as their actions deserve." (Proverbs 24:12, NLT)

We cannot know every detail of work in our companies, unless we micromanage, which is not a good idea. Solomon made the point that while we may not know something, we still don't escape responsibility.

I learned to take the responsibility when I had an employee make an error. I contacted the customer and offered the best possible solution. I've learned that excuses don't solve problems, no matter how good they sound. I told the customer what went wrong, how our business could have done better, and I apologized for the problem. Then, I moved forward as constructively as possible. Each time, even though somebody else created the problem; the responsibility was mine.

Most of us have heard the famous quote from President Truman, "The buck stops here." He was correct; the buck stops with each of us. When we feel the pain of accepting responsibility for a problem, that pain will help us do what is necessary to prevent that misery another time. This improves our management and grows business.

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