



# ACCOUNTABILITY

## “Who’s accountable?”

*If we are at work, what leaps to mind when we hear this question? Do we expect to be blamed for something? Or do we anticipate an opportunity to help solve a problem?*

### Being “Account-able”

Too often in business, being accountable is equated with blame and punishment. This is demotivating and often results in the exact opposite of what we hope for—namely, people who care and extend themselves to achieve results.

More ideally, being “account-able” should focus on what *can* be done, the removal of obstacles, and the satisfaction of achievement. If people are empowered before the fact, rather than blamed after the fact, the entire culture changes. In fact, in organizations where accountability is not used as a club, people are apt to *assume* responsibility and accountability, instead of seeking ways to escape it. Most everyone would agree that accountable people achieve results and are essential to the effective functioning of any organization. So

naturally, a good manager is not only accountable him/herself, but wants to foster accountability throughout the team as well. How is this done?

### 4 SUGGESTIONS for establishing an environment of **accountability**:

1. Set Clear Expectations
2. Assign Responsibility/  
Authority
3. Monitor Progress
4. Report Results

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### 1. Set Clear Expectations

There should be a stated objective. Clear objectives are different from defined methods—objectives tell us WHAT we are to achieve, not HOW we are to achieve. To be effective, objectives should be:

- *Realistic and achievable.*

If all parties don't believe the objective is achievable, disappointment is inevitable.

- *Documented and retrievable.*

Writing it down makes it available anytime and enhances understanding and commitment—it

becomes something of a contract to a mutual purpose.

- *Communicated to everyone involved in its achievement.*

As in many things, communication is the key. To assume understanding is very risky. Initial clarity is not enough; there should be frequent checkpoints along the way to assure mutual understanding.

- *Measurable.*

To be clear on what a successful result will look like we must be able to measure our results. Measurement may be quantitative or qualitative.



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### 2. Assign Responsibility/Authority

Not only must the responsibility for achieving an objective be clearly assigned, but sufficient authority to carry out the responsibility must also be present. To be more specific:

- *Responsibility* means you are the one who will make the choices and decisions regarding how to achieve an objective – you are account-able.
- *Authority* means you have the ability to command the resources necessary to achieve the objective. There are two parts to this: (1) you have the resources at hand to command; (2) you are capable of commanding them.

Not only must proper responsibility and authority be assigned, it must be well defined and communicated to the recipient, and to the entire team. If anyone on the team is unclear about where responsibility and authority resides, it is incumbent on that team member to seek clarity.

### 3. Monitor Progress

Because objectives are measurable, it should be possible to monitor progress on a timely basis. It is important that others be able to see what has been accomplished and how. Monitoring progress provides an opportunity for:

- *Staying aligned with objectives.*  
It is difficult to know if we are on target if we do not monitor progress. We can choose to monitor a variety of factors: milestones, deadlines, standards, products, etc. Auditing our progress makes it much easier to make small course corrections along the way rather than facing major miscalculations at the end of a process.
- *Mentoring.*  
We will not be perfect even when objectives are clearly stated and assigned. Monitoring offers an opportunity both to learn and/or to coach others. A mentoring environment encourages professional development and job satisfaction.

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### 4. Report Results

Results should be reported using the same terms and methods as defined in the objectives. Also, reporting expectations should be made clear at the beginning of an assignment (who should report, to whom, how frequently or under what circumstances, etc.). Recommendations for good reporting include making sure reporting:

- *Is timely.*
- *Is accurate and unbiased.*
- *Includes lessons learned.*

### Things To Do

- ✓ Find out what account-ability means in your department...is it a way to assign blame? Or a way to empower others to achieve results?
- ✓ Consider the four suggestions for encouraging an environment of accountability. Is there room to improve in any of these areas?

### The Bottom Line

Ultimately, the best reason to implement an environment of accountability is simple—it's because we want things to work well. We want to achieve good results for our organization and ourselves.



*"Accountability, most effectively applied, is a forward-looking concept that focuses attention on what I "can do" versus what I "did." As we see it, accountability is something people should want to take, not something they should fear."*

—Roger Connors and Tom Smith, *Journey to the Emerald City*