

HOLDING PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE

Three Simple Rules

An excerpt from: *Thriving in the 21st Century World Using Three Simple Rules*

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As a speaker, and executive advisor I travel thousands of miles every year and work with hundreds of companies. When I ask my clients what they most need, the overwhelming majority of the time, their response is some iteration of:

“We need more revenue, more sales”.

OR

“I need my people to show a greater sense of urgency, take ownership, be more accountable”.

Sales and Accountability are the two biggest challenges for business owners and senior managers in today's highly competitive environment.

Sales is the engine that runs every business. Justifiably, companies focus the majority of their employee development efforts and resources on Sales.

On the other hand, alarmingly little attention is given to Accountability despite the fact that Accountability affects all departments and employees, including Sales. It seems that we care about Accountability only when things go wrong, then Accountability becomes the scapegoat. “No one cares but me”. And what's worse, we expect that to change on demand! Why is it so difficult to get people to be accountable for their areas of responsibility? Both the answer and the solution are simple.

The Answer:

No one really likes to be held accountable and no one wants the thankless job of holding others accountable. It is uncomfortable, it is difficult, and it is rarely done well.

The Solution:

Establish a “Culture of Accountability”. The following *Three Simple Rules* will make it easy for you to hold your people accountable, inspire them to a greater sense of urgency and ownership of responsibility, and establish an enduring Culture of Accountability within your organization:

1. **Clearly communicate and focus your expectations in writing.**
2. **Schedule frequent and structured performance reviews.**
3. **Make your workplace a source of help for your employees.**

Clearly communicate and focus your expectations in writing.

When employees have a clear understanding of what is expected of them they are happier and perform better. There is no uncertainty no unknowns. Keep the expectations focused on no more than 5 primary goals or areas of responsibility.

For every employee in your organization, provide a written description of what you expect of them in order for them to successfully perform their job. The written description should be augmented by a face to face “negotiation” and “understanding” of the 4-5 job goals/responsibilities that are most important to the employees success at their job.

These negotiated, 4-5 goals/responsibilities for each employee should be recorded in their employment files and distributed to the employee in the form of a *Goals and Accountability Worksheet* or template. This worksheet should also provide a place for recording the specific short term “action items” (with performance dates), that the employee commits to perform, in order to accomplish their goals/responsibilities.

When you as a manager and leader define, focus, and record your expectations and the employee agrees, through discussion and negotiation, that those expectations are their goals/responsibilities, you have a mutually agreed basis for assessing performance and establishing employee accountability. The *Goals and Accountability Worksheet* will establish the format for tracking and measuring their progress toward those goals.

Schedule, frequent and structured performance reviews.

Uncertainty breeds fear and fear is the enemy of both innovation and productivity. Prevent employee uncertainty by establishing formal performance reviews and frequent informal performance acknowledgements. For every employee in your organization, schedule quarterly performance review dates and establish a positive system for tracking and reviewing their progress on monthly, weekly, and daily basis.

On a daily basis, are your employee's recognized/praised for the job well done, as much or more than they are corrected and criticized for mistakes? “The beatings will continue until the morale improves” mentality, works for neither accountability nor motivation. A good rule of thumb is that, opportunities to praise your employees should out number the opportunities to criticize by 3 to 1.

Does your company have mechanisms for catching employee mistakes? Most likely it does. What about identifying successes? If you don't formally identify positive employee performance on a weekly basis, you should.

On a monthly basis do you acknowledge an “employee of the month” or better yet, “Monthly top performers” and their accomplishments? Provide a section on your *Goals and Accountability* worksheet where employees can record their progress/successes

and acknowledge their needs.

Share the results, acknowledge the effort, celebrate the employee's successes, and identify opportunities to improve, weekly or bi-weekly, but never less than monthly.

On a quarterly basis formal individual reviews should be mandatory. If you go longer than quarterly, the employee can lose sight of how they are doing, or may expect the review to be automatic raise time.

Begin by having the employees review themselves. Use a standardized formal review form for quarterly reviews. Keep it simple, no more than the five or six questions:

- 1) What were your 2 or 3 biggest successes in the last quarter?
- 2) What are your 2 or 3 top opportunities to improve?
- 3) What should be your number one and number two focus for the next quarter?
- 4) Who do you most need help from to accomplish your goals/ responsibilities in the next quarter?
- 5) If you had the power, what would you change that relates to your job?

After the employee has completed the self-review, the reviewer should give their review, addressing the same questions:

- ♦ Reinforce the answers to the employee answers that they agree with
- ♦ Confront and question, the answers that the reviewer perceives to be incorrect, inaccurate, or unacceptable.
- ♦ Negotiate agreement on corrective action for the next quarter.
- ♦ Record all answers and agreed actions in writing in on the formal review form and both parties sign it.

Make your workplace a source of help for your employees.

Some people need less help than others, but no one knows everything and we all need help sometimes. Every employee must know where (to whom), within the organization, they can go for help. In your organization is it clear, to each employee, where they can get help when they are not meeting their expectations or when they are confused?

Is help available only at top? As a "hands-on leader" you may want to "be there" for your employees. However, if you are the only one they feel they can go to for help, prepare for bottlenecks, frustrations, and low productivity.

Make sure there is more than one person that your employees can go to for help. Cross train your exceptional performers to insure that they are qualified to give the help needed. In order to insure that they are not only willing, but eager, to help, establish some recognition or compensation for them when they do help others.

Some of the most costly mistakes for organizations are made by people were unwilling or afraid to seek help when they need to. An employee's desire or even willingness to seek help at work is directly related to their security about the consequences. Make sure that your employees understand that seeking help is encouraged and never judged as weakness. Emphasize that employees who seek help, are demonstrating job competence by following company policy.

If you want your people to be more accountable, it is up to you. You must lead, take ownership of the task of establishing a *culture of accountability*. Get started now by following the ***Three Simple Rules for Holding People Accountable***.