Want Accountability Within Your Team? Start at the Top

Organizations with a strong sense of accountability and personal ownership thrive. But how do you get there?

November 19, 2020 5 min read

Opinions expressed by *Entrepreneur* contributors are their own.

Accountability has never been as important as it is right now. Whether in board rooms in times of tight resource constraints or virtual team settings where progress is dependent on self-discipline and commitment, establishing accountability across a team is paramount for success within any organization.

Most leadership circles agree that accountability is one of the essential traits of any high-performing team. But if that's true, then why is it that so many companies fail to establish a culture that nurtures accountable relationships?

Since we as human beings are nuanced and complex, the process for establishing accountability should be equally nuanced. It requires us to engage fully with all our senses and be present; we must always keep the big picture in mind. With our teams, we should celebrate progress beyond just results. We must acknowledge and provide feedback when accountability is demonstrated well. Let's consider what true accountability within a team requires.

Related: 6 Actions Even the Least Confrontational Managers Must Take to Hold Employees Accountable

Vision and clear goals

Every company has a vision and mission built upon a foundation of values and core capabilities. Your company's goals take two forms, generally speaking: quantitative goals (e.g., growth by X%, revenue/profit, operational KPIs) and qualitative goals (e.g., specific leadership traits and values). In an ideal world, these corporate-level, macro goals are broken down into department-level micro-goals and measured through regular performance reviews. For example, you might have a monthly performance meeting comparing forecasted goals vs. actual performance.

Though some departments have concrete and measurable goals, such as operations (on-time delivery, quality), business development (revenue growth, customer satisfaction) and purchasing (cost reduction, supplier performance), more horizontal departments such as corporate innovation, IT and HR can struggle with clear lines of accountability because their impact on the quantitative goals of the organization is less well defined or they may lack a sense of urgency. Regardless of which role you occupy within an organization, every employee should have an answer to the following questions:

- What is the role of my department?
- What are my professional goals?
- What are the tools and resources to accomplish them?
- How does my service (or lack of service) serve our team's, division's and company's purposes?

Related: 8 Ways to Stay Accountable With Your Goals

The 3 Cs

Driving accountability is hard work. Establishing accountable relationships within your team requires years of experience

grounded in trial and error, a whole lot of success and failure, and the ability to self-regulate one's emotions. There are some key traits every leader must possess in order to get what they want from their team:

- **Confidence.** As a leader, you need to understand your role and the ability of your department to meet overall objectives. You need to trust your skills and capabilities as well as the strengths of your team. For example, a team SWOT analysis can help to crystalize your core strengths, and you can confidently play into those strengths.
- **Communication.** Whether speaking to team members or clients, you need to offer clear requests, commitments, agreements and deadlines in order to drive progress. Ambiguity can lead to miscommunication, resentment or worse.
- **Courage.** Every leader needs to have the fortitude to have uncomfortable, difficult conversations. You need to instigate those crucial conversations when commitments are missed. Remain open to criticism, push through the discomfort of conflict and regulate fiery emotions in order to find the right solution. For instance, providing honest and specific feedback in a performance conversation is crucial for the development of an employee. Shying away from crucial feedback can be a selfish act, taking away the growth potential of an employee in exchange for the comfort of a manager.

Related: Build a Culture of Accountability in 5 Steps

Explicit declarations and an aligned codex

As leaders, our job is to bring people together from different geographies, time zones, languages, cultures and upbringings. In our global business world, one word can have 10 different

meanings to 10 different people. You must therefore agree on your definition of success and create a codex—an official collection of processes or standard operating procedures—that works and speaks to each individual on your team. Once defined, simplify it as an easy-to-remember acronym to embed it in everyone's mind. For example, in one of our team workshops, we developed a unique codex based on the word PERFORM.

Purpose and Values

Empowerment

Relationship

Flexibility

Optimal Productivity

Recognition and Appreciation

Morale

Creating a codex as a team empowered every team member to actively participate in the definition and established the foundation of accountability through meaning and trust. Through this codex, we established how to run effective meetings and follow through with minutes. Our annual performance review conversations became more specific and measurable based on a defined set of actions and behaviors.

While most leaders do a great job of defining goals and possessing the 3 Cs, very rarely do you find a leader declaring their version of success and painting a custom codex that defines the operating gears of a team.

Accountability is the glue that ties vision to the execution. Investing in an accountable culture is one of the most important priorities of any organization. And remember: Accountability starts with self-management first. We cannot

manage others until we learn to manage ourselves.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/358398