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Accountability Matters

By Founder & CEO, Sally McGhee

Accountability is an interesting topic. Unlike alignment, accountability is frequently talked about. Customers want accountability, leaders want accountability, most job descriptions even list “accountability” as a desired skill. We all want it in our work and home lives, but most of us don’t know how to get it.

When I was younger, it was easier to simply NOT do things I agreed to do, the agreements I made were often inconvenient! When no one held me accountable for these agreements, I assumed I could live my life like that. Single moments of accountability would tide me over and make me think I was trustworthy. However, internally when I wasn’t accountable, I judged myself and it ate away at my confidence and power.

There is also an impact when you don’t do what you say you’re going to. You start to lose credibility. Managers might limit what they delegate to you and take on more, creating resentment and potential family issues around work-life balance. It can create a lack of trust and start a cycle of firing and hiring.

So, what gets in the way?

It’s important to explore what’s hindering your own accountability and address it so you can get back in integrity. Maybe it’s a family drama, a financial situation or a disorganized system. To be accountable, it’s important to make sure your world is in order; it’s challenging to ask others to be accountable if you know you aren’t demonstrating it yourself.

I hear people say they don’t like people holding them accountable nor do they like holding others accountable. This might stem from a lack of trust, or a fear of hard conversations. Maybe they were held accountable by parents or teachers growing up and it didn’t feel good. Perhaps it has to do with their pride, a fear of vulnerability or the desire to appear a certain way to their peers. I find people’s aversion for being held, or holding others accountable interesting, because when asked, most people want to *be* accountable.

Having accountability enables autonomy, increased trust, professionalism, and more things to get done. When your team is accountable, employees can work virtually, deadlines are met, results are produced and you can have more fun! I’ve found that the easiest way to ensure my team is accountable, is to create a culture of accountability, meaning: we’re all doing what we say and saying what we do.

Renegotiation is an important tool in accountability. We’ve all been in circumstances where we can’t complete what we said we were going to do, or can’t complete it by the due date. Whether it’s over commitment, someone getting sick, a late shipment, or even the weather, everyone knows that stuff happens. Being accountable when you can’t do what you

said you were going to do means reaching out to the involved parties and renegotiating. This may mean swallowing your pride, but it also means you will be seen as a person of integrity.

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.”

-Aristotle

As a leader, it's important to both model and protect accountability. When individuals don't do what they said they were going to, a good leader will remind them, even if the conversation might be uncomfortable. I find people don't want to be unaccountable, so when I have accountability conversations, the individual usually leaves more inspired and feeling better. It's important to make it OK to talk about accountability because maybe the individual has something going on at home, or maybe he or she just doesn't have the necessary skills to do the job. These conversations can help clear up what's going on and make expectations known. I use performance reviews to encourage accountability in my staff. Whatever approach you take, the more you do it, the more natural it will be and the quicker you and the team can focus on accomplishing your goals and objectives.

Accountability is a standard or commitment that we practice; it's a learned skill. The wonderful thing about doing what we say and saying what we do is that it creates confidence and personal integrity. We're held in high regard when we keep our word. Accountability means something to those around you and you'll be seen as professional, upstanding and a man or woman of integrity. Ask yourself, what kind of impact do you want to make? What do you want to contribute? How do you want to be perceived?

Ultimately, operating from a space of accountability will better serve you professionally and personally. You will experience a higher degree of self-confidence, you will accomplish more tasks and goals, and your team will see you as an asset. Look deep inside and, if you're not operating in accountability, identify why and work towards fixing it. It's never too late to start!