

Accountability Begins with Trust

Submitted by [David Powe](#) of AIO PX Management Consulting



How often have you heard someone in your organization say, “She or he needs to be held accountable?” Most of the time, what they mean by that is that the person needs to be punished for not performing to the expectations of the person saying it. This is definitely not how to build an accountable culture in your organization. The reason, in my opinion, is because creating negative consequences, although sometimes necessary, generally erodes trust. And an environment where people feel safe and trusted is the foundation for building a culture of accountability. In great teams and organizations, people choose to be accountable. They don’t need to be held accountable by their leaders.

So, how do we develop this elusive concept of accountability in our teams and organization, especially now, when teams are increasingly fluid and virtual? In teams I lead, I start with making sure we have a good working definition of accountability. Here is the definition I like to use:

Accountability is when you are trusted by the team for timely completion of mutually agreed upon deliverables. This trust enables team members to seek help whenever the deliverable is in jeopardy.

The best leaders don’t take remedial action when a teammate fails, they build a system and culture where people succeed. The elements of such successful systems are:

- **Crystal Clear and Mutually Agreed Expectations** – Determine explicit and measurable goals that are agreed to by all team members.
- **Definite Capability** – Evaluate whether team members have the knowledge, training, tools and time to deliver on the goal.
- **Effective Measurements** – Measure the things which drive the process and are largely in the control of the team.
- **Frequent and Transparent Communication** – Meet regularly as a team and conduct management reviews with a focus on directing resources to highest priorities. Reward those who ask for help when they need it.
- **Honest, but Kind, Feedback** – Give specific positive and negative feedback in the moment, but always respect the dignity of each team member.

- **Meaningful Connection to the Outcome** – Determine the potential win for each individual if the team is successful, and also understand what will be lost if the objectives aren't met.

The elements and systems begin to fall apart when people don't trust each other. Instead of mutually agreed to and clear expectations, negotiations occur to protect one individual or another. Communications become guarded. Honest feedback is impossible.

So, if you want to develop and sustain accountability, by all means pay attention to the aforementioned elements. Start by building trust with the people on your team. Be proactive, vulnerable, and show that you care as much about them as people as you do about the deliverables. You will be rewarded with people who hold themselves accountable!

About the Author

David Powe is the partner and lead consultant at AIOPX Management Consulting. AIOPX helps businesses increase profits, cash flow and enterprise value through the application of Operations Excellence methodologies. David can be reached at dpowe@aiopx.com or 585-704-6241.