

# 5 SECRETS TOP LEADERS NEED TO KNOW TO HOLD PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE AND GET RESULTS

WITHOUT NAGGING OR BEING A JERK



**5 EAGLES**  
— LEADERSHIP —

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# INTRODUCTION

**W**hen companies fail to deliver on their promises or meet their standards, there is almost always one root cause: a lack of accountability.

An [HBR study](#) shows that the most common leadership shortcoming is holding employees accountable. [Another study](#) suggests that more than two thirds of leaders fail to adequately hold people accountable. This leadership shortfall exists across demographics, locations, and levels of leadership and is costing businesses billions.

The costs of allowing employees to shirk their duties is immense.

- Wear and tear on the other team members who are carrying the team (free-rider problem) increases talent turnover
- Poor productivity and outcomes costs customers and partners
- Not holding people accountable creates a culture of mediocrity
- Lack of accountability undermines credibility of the leader

The problem has gotten worse over the past few decades. "Cancel culture" forces leaders to avoid conflict. Instead, they focus on preventing the possibility of offending anyone. But the dark side of "everyone just getting along" is that far too many people are not held accountable when they fail to meet standards.

Typically there are three leader mindsets that cause this shortcoming:

- The need of some leaders to be liked
- A conflict-averse attitude towards personal interactions – a lack of courage
- Leaders lack the skill and willingness to provide candid and caring feedback

But there is hope for leaders who want to see their company thrive and want employees to meet standards without needing to gripe at them.

Establishing a culture of accountability helps leaders enforce standards with less effort and more success. And it all starts with having the courage to provide employees with caring and candid feedback.



# FEEDBACK: THE ESSENTIAL LEADERSHIP TASK.



It is every leader's responsibility to take care of their team. When leaders fail to hold other leaders accountable, they put the people they lead at risk.

Accountability feedback helps you develop your team, enforce standards, and sets them up for success. It is difficult for people to be successful if they don't know what they are doing wrong. It is the leader's responsibility to tell them and help them meet or exceed standards.

By following these five leadership secrets leaders can move past the awkward part of feedback and help their people improve.

## 1

## AVOID “MALIGNANT EMPATHY” WHERE YOU CARE MORE ABOUT NOT OFFENDING THEM THAN YOU DO ABOUT THEIR LEARNING AND GROWING.

Mary is a manager in a tech company in charge of product development. One of her employees, Jeremy, is frequently late and often arrives unprepared for meetings. The quality of his work isn't where it should be, and he is holding the team back. When the other employees point it out, Mary explains that Jeremy is new and should be given some slack. “Besides, I don't want to hurt his feelings. And, if I correct him all the time, he won't like me.”

Mary has fallen into a common leadership trap. The desire to be liked has over-ridden her duty as a leader to enforce standards. She mistakenly feels like she is doing Jeremy a favor by not correcting him. But Jeremy's reputation as a professional is suffering, and Mary's credibility as a leader is weakened.

Because Mary cares more about his feelings than his performance, Jeremy is being denied the opportunity to learn and grow. He isn't getting the feedback he needs to improve. Without candid feedback, the situation is unlikely to improve. Eventually Jeremy is likely to lose his job and hurt his reputation.

Caring for your employees means you are willing to be candid with them about their shortcomings.

## 2

## SET CLEAR STANDARDS AND EXPECTATIONS – HELP EMPLOYEES REALLY UNDERSTAND THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES AND OUR VALUES



Mary's first move should be to ensure that Jeremy clearly understands the standards. Shortcomings usually spawn from a lack of training, or a lack of compliance. Mary needs to find out which one it is so she can guide Jeremy to better performance.

She can do this by being very clear about standards and expectations. Clarity comes from understanding the *why* behind the requirements. Employees who understand the purpose behind a policy or procedure are more likely to comply with them than those who don't. Expectations are based on standards, responsibilities, and values. Without clearly understanding these, Jeremy is making things up as he goes along. If Mary wants Jeremy to live up to expectations, she must be absolutely clear about what those are. The company's values drive the culture, and everyone living up to those values creates a winning culture that helps companies thrive.

## 3

## START FEEDBACK CONVERSATIONS WITH WHY YOU CARE (ABOUT THEM, ABOUT THE STANDARDS, ABOUT THE COMPANY)

Providing accountability feedback can be an uncomfortable conversation. Many leaders (like Mary) don't want to hurt people's feelings. Most employees want to feel like they are doing a good job and telling them otherwise can be awkward at best.

Personally connecting with the employee makes feedback conversations less uncomfortable. Letting them know that you care about their success and the success of the company changes the nature of the conversation. Explaining why a standard is important helps them internalize the reasons they should meet or exceed those standards.

Starting with care isn't the same as the often-used "sandwich method." By starting and ending with a positive, employees often undervalue the critical part in the middle. It dilutes the message that their performance isn't where it needs to be and sends a message that praise comes easy and criticism doesn't matter as much. This rarely has the intended results. If feedback truly is a gift, there is no need to sandwich it.

Knowing how to apply this important skill can be tricky. That's why I offer a [Leadership Breakthrough call](#) where we'll identify 5 specific things that can hold you back when giving accountability feedback, and the #1 thing you need to do to move forward.

Book your Leadership Breakthrough Call here



## 4

## PLAN OUT YOUR CONVERSATION IN ADVANCE. KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO SAY.



Many leaders dive into accountability conversations without much thought. This often leads to emotionally-charged, one-way conversations that may deliver the message, but typically not in a way that helps the employee grow. Jeremy may learn to make sure he does things right simply out of fear, but that is a recipe for a minimally engaged worker.

Plan your feedback conversation for an appropriate time and place. As a general rule, avoid criticizing people in public. Instead, take them aside to make corrections. “Praise in public, criticize in private” is a great rule to remember.



Make notes about the specific performance or behavior issues and refer to them during the conversation. Have notes with specific examples that will help the employee understand their shortcoming.

Prepare for the outcome. If you want to help the employee grow, have a plan for that.

Avoid:

- Accusations
- Exaggerations
- Judgement
- Vague references
- Personal attacks
- Condescending
- Criticizing things they have no control over

Do:

- Make sure you fully understand the situation
- Provide specific information that helps the employee improve
- Emphasize results
- Discuss specific problem areas that need improvement instead of attacking the whole person
- Be calm and unthreatening
- Make room for feedback

## 5

## SPEAK WITH CANDOR AND CARE. THE OUTCOME YOU WANT IS IMPROVED PERFORMANCE.



Don't beat around the bush. If you are uncomfortable, start the conversation with "this is going to be a bit uncomfortable, but I care enough about you and this company to have this conversation." That typically breaks the ice and lets both of you know what is about to happen.

Get straight to the point. Candidness is under-rated and should be your go-to technique here. People receiving feedback often miss the message when you are trying to be subtle. Keep in mind the outcome you desire. Do you want mere compliance? Do you want the employee to quit? Or do you want to help Jeremy become the most engaged employee on the team capable and willing to bring his best every day?

Your demeanor and clear message will determine the outcome.

# BRING YOUR BEST SELF TO THE CONVERSATION

Giving accountability feedback takes practice and a deliberate approach. Gaining confidence by applying these five secrets will help leaders overcome their fear of providing candid feedback. These techniques will help connect leaders with their team. Most importantly, it will help establish a culture of accountability that will help their team thrive.

Learning how to provide accountability feedback can be difficult. In my Leadership Breakthrough call we'll find 5 specific things that you can do to give better feedback, and we'll identify the #1 thing you need to do to move forward.

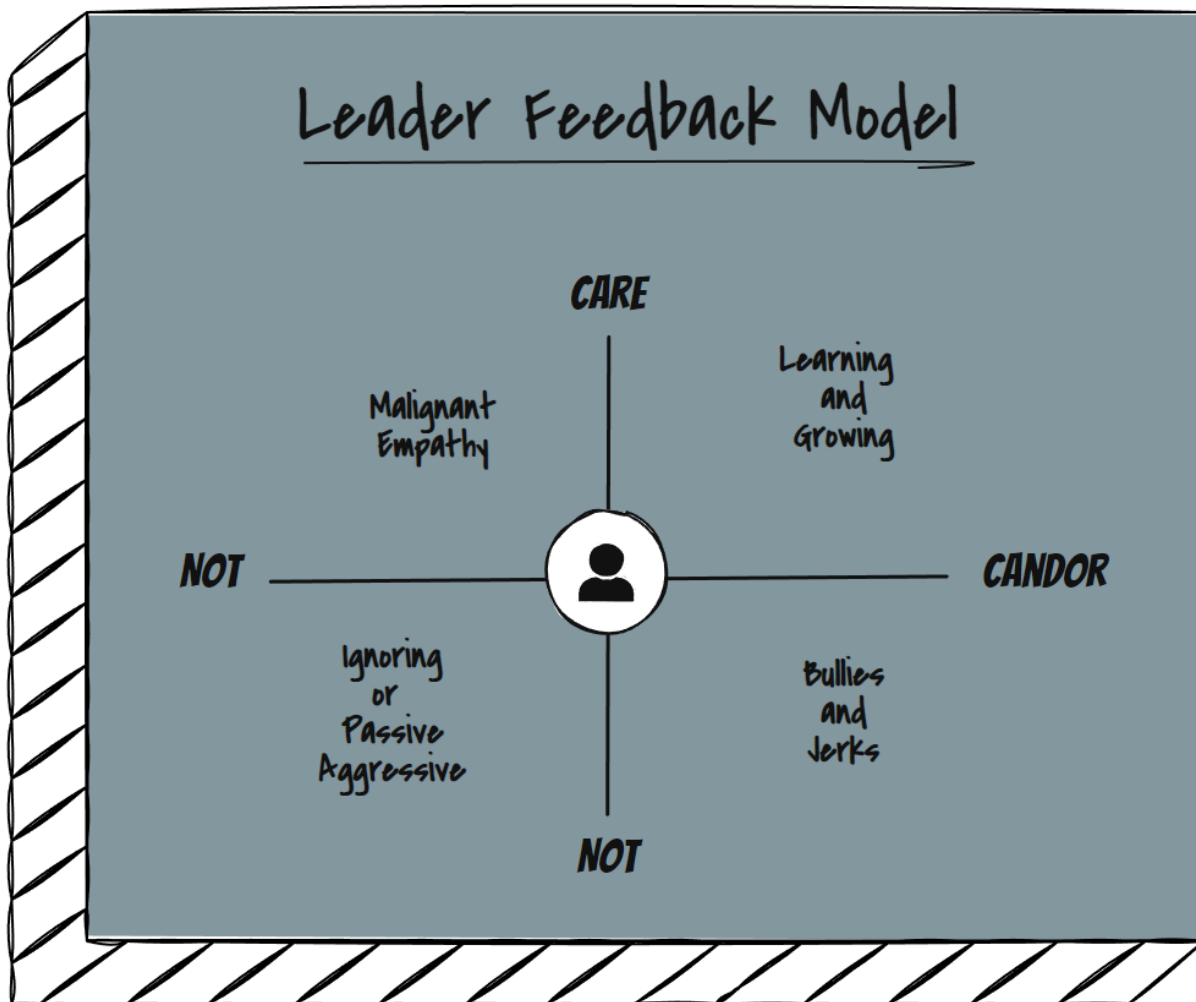
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