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8 strategies for bringing greater accountability to your workplace



Not every leader understands nor is willing to hold people accountable for their actions or lack thereof. Doing so takes a bit of courage but is necessary for the health of an organization.

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Let me be clear from the onset – not every leader understands nor is willing to hold people accountable for their actions or lack thereof. Doing so takes a bit of courage some just can't muster.

So what do I mean by the term workplace accountability?

For me it's a simple explanation: fulfilling the assignments given to you as part of your workplace responsibilities. It's doing what you are paid to do and not shortchanging yourself, your customers or the organization that pays your salary.

But, let me come to the defense of employees for a moment. At fault in many cases is the leader who fails to articulate precisely the expectations of each position. Vagueness is not allowed in the same breath as accountability. It's about being crystal clear regarding what you want to happen and making sure the expectations come to fruition.

Here are some ideas on how leaders can bring greater accountability to their workplace.

1. Clearly explain expectations

Too often, we hire and give vague guidance to the job requirements, letting the new hire make decisions without our direction. In the absence of direction, people will do what they think is right. It is imperative that leaders are explicit when assigning work responsibilities and creating goals supporting the focus of the organization.

Don't just give direction, extract the understanding of your worker by seeking feedback on your message. Continue this until you and the employee have the same understanding of the assignment. Leaders, if there is misunderstanding of your message, it's your responsibility. You must ascertain employee understanding, otherwise you cannot hold them accountable.

2. Provide proper resources

Think of creating job expectations like building a house. You would never expect a carpenter to build a house without tools. Likewise, it's foolish to present high expectations to employees without providing the tools for them to complete their work. Both the leader and employee should explore the types of tools that work best. Once settled to everyone's satisfaction, accountability is in place.

3. Train as needed

Even if you always hire the best and the brightest, few come out of college or from other employers with the experience and knowledge to slip into your job without help. Determine what knowledge is needed to complete an assigned task. If there is some missing element, provide training. An untrained worker is more likely to make mistakes than an experienced and knowledgeable worker. Train first, then implement accountability.

4. Inculcate accountability in your organizational culture

Start the process by having a clear picture of the culture. It's driven by company leaders and mimicked by employees. Thus culture dictates employee behavior. Workers sense very quickly where they can work in a "less than" mode. However, if the culture frowns on half-effort, behavior will change or the company will change employees. Setting expectations creates culture and allows accountability to permeate throughout the organization.

5. Emphasize accountability in performance reviews

Providing continuous feedback on performance to employees is a requirement of a strong leader. When employees are engaged in performance reviews, that is the moment a leader can revisit accomplishments compared to expectations. This may sound harsh, but you cannot avoid discussing tough issues. You are there to help them develop their careers, provide gut-level feedback in a caring way, help improve performance and skills and create

an improvement plan with its own accountability parameters.

6. Develop a timeline

Leaders who don't give an employee guidance when a project assigned is due cannot hold them accountable. Agree when a project is due, provide the necessary resources for an employee to complete the task, ask for periodic updates to keep momentum moving, celebrate accomplishments and, when possible, reward for a job well done.

7. Empower employees

It isn't necessary nor recommended you design every step of the process for completing a project. Let employees exercise their individuality and build the process. Your job is to get out of the way unless trouble surfaces. Few things trump personal achievement. Give employees a chance to prove they are creative and have the knowledge to provide value to the company. Their ingenuity may surprise you. Who knows, perhaps they may even complete the task better than you might have done it!

8. Hold yourself accountable

This is not a one-way street of behaviors. Model accountability with your actions, words and support to others. Create culture that benefits both employees and the organization. Employees are watching and a mixed signal does not serve either of you well.

If properly handled, accountability can be the driving force for excellence. A lack of it can tear an organization apart. Want to be a leader? Be willing to implement a fair but firm accountability process. Doing this may just be your greatest career move.

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