

Seven Ways to Build Accountable Organizations

by Henry Browning (Source: Center for Creative Leadership)

1. **Clear Roles, Team Leadership and Individual Ownership.**

People struggle to be accountable when roles and processes are ambiguous. Removing as much confusion as possible about who is doing what and how they will proceed is an important step. If a team is truly accountable, members will identify gaps, learn new roles and processes, and ultimately build a more capable team.

2. **A Sense of Ownership for Team Results.**

How does team accountability work? Focus on team processes. How is the team working toward goals and outcome? Are team members effective? Do they feel 100 percent accountable to improving the process? Each member should have the obligation to seek information, give and receive feedback, and point out the need for corrective action at any time.

3. **Freedom, Support, and Control to Navigate Competing Priorities.**

Most problems have multiple right answers, so give people the freedom and control they need to make decisions. The first solutions your teams and direct reports come up with will probably be pretty good. Improve upon them instead of inserting your own. Support is the key -- be sure people have the resources, knowledge, and assistance they need. With this approach, team members increase their skills, confidence, and ownership.

4. **It's Not About Punishment.**

If your goal in fostering accountability is to know who to punish when revenue targets are not met or budgets are missed, you will only succeed in creating fear. No one will be willing to step up, speak out, or try something new. Innovation and risk taking will be lost. Once the rumor mill of an organization circulates a story of someone stepping out and being punished, other employees will be skittish about taking initiative to find solutions.

5. **It's About Improvement.**

Accountability is the foundation for creating a learning organization. If you want sustainable high-quality processes, you need to be able to see what's working and what isn't -- and analyze the cause. To that end, each person needs to honestly say what they knew, what they thought, and what they did (or didn't do). One important thing you can do to support a learning atmosphere is to take a systems approach as well as holding individuals accountable. Seek to understand what aspects of the situation have influenced the process, system, culture or circumstances.

6. **The Expectation of Evaluation.**

In accountable organizations, no one expects to "stay under the radar." In fact, people seek feedback because they know it is intended to improve the process and add to their knowledge. These organizations use multiple forms of feedback and evaluation to assess the health and success of a manager, process, or department. Organizations lacking multiple feedback mechanisms only discover shortcomings when it is too late.

7. **Integrity Counts.**

People are called out if they don't do what they say they will do. When anyone falls short, they admit it and work to improve. Someone consistently falling short? A sure sign of low commitment and a clue that something is missing in your culture of accountability.