



Creating a Culture of Accountability™

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Accountability is both a personal promise and a cultural quality, and one does not exist for long without the other.

At the macro level – the business unit or the organization – leaders create the conditions for accountability to arise by creating space for quality conversations, designing a feedback-rich environment, and engaging in difficult conversations. This is the culture in which accountability thrives.

At the micro level, the presence of these conditions creates a greater possibility that the personal promise will happen, and a higher probability that it will succeed. If an organization is taking the micro-level actions and not getting the desired result, it is necessary to move to the macro conditions, and see what is missing.

At the macro level...

accountability as a cultural quality

Creating Space for Quality Conversations

Creating space for quality conversations is the fundamental in building relationship. It is moving away from pure task orientation, and demonstrating genuine intent to know and understand. It is opening up the opportunity to tackle challenge, discuss what's important, clear roadblocks, and generate commitment. It is setting the conditions for an accountable network to flourish, with more trust, less micro-management, and more productivity.

Designing a Feedback-Rich Environment

Designing a feedback-rich environment is committing to self-awareness and continuous improvement, across the organization. It is building a common understanding of what feedback is and how it is done. It is learning what athletes and artists know – that feedback is central to improved performance. It is shifting the mindset from feedback-as-punitive to feedback-as-positive. It is being the leader who models the way by choosing vulnerability and inviting feedback, consistently.

Engaging in Difficult Conversations

Engaging in difficult conversations is an essential leadership activity that too many leaders cannot or will not do. It is honest, direct, respectful, and it is a learned skill. It is not bullying, and it does not insist on toxic harmony. It allows people to name reality and surface issues that need attention. Its absence is perhaps the prime factor in robbing a culture of accountability.

At the micro level...

accountability as a personal promise

Clarifying

Clarifying is the rigorous insistence on a common understanding of the goal. It is checking assumptions as a matter of practice. It is refusing to leave room for misinterpretation and misunderstanding. It is being disciplined about two-way communication: message sent equals message received. It is knowing that a lack of specificity must result in a lack of accountability. What exactly are we trying to achieve?

Contracting

Contracting is negotiating the how: what is required of me and what is required of you? It is the mutual, back and forth discussion of details, laying the path to the desired result. It is knowing that time spent in negotiation pays off in clearer accountability. It is continuing to the point where both parties will offer the same description of the plan, and both will see it as realistic and doable. How exactly are we going to achieve?

Committing

Committing is the personal promise of action. It is putting self and reputation on the line. It is taking on the measurements and milestones that will be needed to chart progress. Are you all the way in?

This three-step is a fluid and cyclical process. Inevitably, experience will reveal where clarity was missed. That will create an opportunity to re-clarify, based on what we know now. This in turn creates the potential for stronger accountability, for re-contracting and re-committing from a place of greater understanding and mutual knowing.