

Accountability — The Ultimate “A Player” Magnet

Accountability. It's the element of leadership and management where even the smartest and most well-intentioned managers fall. They're either too tough (the old school type) or too soft (the new school type). And if you're like most, you flip-flop between the two. You're too soft until you realize people are taking advantage. You react by being too tough, which backfires, but only always. Finding the sweet spot in the middle is a gift to your team. And, it's a gift that nobody is born with.

Learning how to do accountability well is a skill. It draws on your powers of observation. It requires your curiosity to pick up on the bread crumbs most managers miss. It tests your emotional intelligence, **because the best accountability challenges people to own their strengths more than correct their weaknesses.** It calls for the best version of you, the one who cares far more about people than it does about money, profit or deadlines. And, more than occasionally, for the sake of the health of the team and the "A players" on it, it requires you to be the bad guy.

It looks like a paradox but isn't one. Like a parent who loves their child enough to say "no" and set boundaries, managers who care about people, do accountability more and not less. Not because the people on your team are children but because we all need other people to help us see the things we can't see about ourselves.

What would it look like to make it your mission to be "on it" with each person on your team. To give them the attention, the care, *the love*, that we all need to move through a stuck place. And it's that kind of place, *a place where accountability is not a word but is the DNA of the organization that "A Players" want to be at*. Russell C., one of our members, said it best. Here's what he wrote:

"So much of what passes for business culture change is the outside-in, 'big picture' structural things (like new visions and missions). But what really creates a great place to work are the little things: The ways people communicate (or don't); The ways people kick the can (or don't); The ways

people show up on time and keep their agreements (or don't). Leaders love to talk about wanting 'A' players, but they usually don't understand what 'A' Players want.

“'A' Players don't need a fancy mission statement. 'A' Players want to be where: Everyone is pulling their weight. Everyone is holding themselves responsible. The managers are holding everyone accountable for doing that.”

So, how do you do it? We've developed a framework to help you get there. We call it The Accountability Dial. It has one purpose: to give you a set of benchmarks so that you don't go too fast (another way of saying too tough) or too slow (too soft). It's a map of sorts, a way to locate where you are, and where your team member is, in the process. Today we're going to talk about Step Three in the process: what we call The Conversation. In the course you'll learn the first two steps, The Mention (how to bring up a problematic behavior for the first time), and the Invitation (how

to show someone a pattern of problematic behavior that's developing).

The Conversation

The Conversation is what happens when steps one and two don't work, and you need to take things to the next level. What follows from here on out is the structure of The Conversation, the guidelines, and examples to help you have it most effectively. It's a structure you can follow in other kinds of professional conversations as well.

The steps aren't rigid. Don't let yourself be boxed in by a system. Use your words. Find your voice. Think of these as benchmarks to be achieved at one point or another, and in one or more conversations if that's what it takes.

- › Set The Scene
- › Show The Pattern
- › Find The Four Impacts

- › Get A Personal Commitment
- › Make A Realistic Plan
- › Keep It On The Calendar

Set The Scene

Even though you've made a few attempts to bring this pattern to their attention (in Steps 1 and 2), it's important to remember that they haven't fully appreciated the urgency. Start the conversation by refreshing their memory. Set The Scene by talking about the previous attempts you've made to raise the topic.

“Remember the other day when I mentioned ...”

Show The Pattern

Your job is to help them connect the dots between the specific examples to discover the pattern. If you “tell it” to

them as if agreeing with you is a foregone conclusion, they can't own it for themselves. Ask questions to trigger their curiosity.

“What do you see these two events have in common ...?”

Find The Four Impacts

If you look hard enough, you can find four types of impacts in every problematic behavior. Use these questions to find each one. Remember, your job is to ask these questions and as many follow up questions as it takes to **get them to find the answers**. If they find the answers they're likely to grow. If you give them the answers, it's a safe bet that nothing will change.

1. How is this pattern negatively impacting other people on the team?

2. How is this pattern negatively impacting the business goals?
3. How is this pattern negatively impacting our relationship (between them and you as their manager)?
4. **How is this pattern negatively impacting you *personally*?**

As you'll soon discover, if you can get them to come up with real answers to these four questions things are about to get a lot better for everyone.

Get A Personal Commitment

Having your team member say "This won't happen again" is not an agreement. An agreement comes from a sober acknowledgment of the problem, an awareness of the impacts, and personal commitment to do something about it. If you end The Conversation (or let them end it) before that

happens you're not giving your employee the best mentoring you can. Stay in there. Invest fifteen more minutes of your day into this conversation. It's the right thing to do. And, it will save you hours of extra work later.

Your goal is to have your team member draw a line in the sand for themselves, not for you or the business. Ask open-ended questions like the ones below. Encourage them to write down their answers.

“So, given what we've been talking about, how would you describe in your words what needs to change and why?”

“What would it mean to you, what would it change in your life, if you could change this pattern?”

Make A Realistic Plan

People don't change overnight. It's human and reasonable to want to believe otherwise. But don't be fooled by

big promises or bold pronouncements—from others or in yourself. It's a huge moment when someone discovers a deep theme, something that's been holding them back for years, *perhaps even their entire life*. As their mentor, it's your job to not let them waste the moment by falling into the trap of biting off too much change at once. Help them find the next smallest step they can take. It could be refraining from a behavior they're trying to change for the rest of the day. It could be refraining from it for the next 15 minutes. The biggest help you can be is by going as small as you possibly can imagine.

While they're working on taking their small steps, what small steps can you take to support them? What can you do from your position of authority that can make it more likely for them to succeed? Is there a system that you see needs to be created or updated? A conversation with someone else on the team, or the leader of another department, to clarify roles and responsibilities? Get curious. Ask ques-

tions. Listen to their answers for what the solutions might be. Then act.

Keep It On The Calendar

Don't leave the change process to chance. Schedule a next meeting to complete this round of the process. Or, as is very often the case, to continue a conversation that you feel like you only got partway through. Keeping the conversation on the calendar is not only a best practice, but it also sends the unequivocal message to your team member that this topic matters. In short, scheduling the next meeting:

- › Helps them by keeping the issue front of mind
- › Helps you by reminding you to watch for how they are progressing in the interim

As you complete the meeting, it's a good opportunity to review the specifics. Go back through the steps—out loud

with the person you're trying to help—to make sure there's no ambiguity on anything you've talked about. Ask them to put things in their words. Pay particular attention to the next step they're committing to taking. Is it realistic? Do they have the support they need? Here's the final question to ask yourself as you complete The Conversation:

“Do they know exactly what they are going to do next, why it matters, and by when?”

Put Yourself In Their Shoes

Having a boss is not easy. If you have one, you know this personally. No matter how well-intentioned or kind they may be, when an authority figure in your life is pushing you to make changes, it's easy to get triggered, to shut down and to fall into self-sabotage. Talk with them about this possibility. Share with them one of your experiences where someone was trying to help you grow and you resisted or couldn't hear what they were saying. Be vulner-

able about the price you paid. Tell them what you learned from the experience. Share the moment that it shifted if you can pinpoint it. In short, be the manager for them that you'd like to have yourself.

Where Do You Go From Here?

If you'd like to get in-depth feedback on how to go further with The Accountability Dial, register for the full course [here](#). Whether you're the CEO, on a management team, or a coach or consultant looking to develop your communication skills, The Accountability Dial course is a great next step. Other questions? Drop us a line at hello@refound.com. We'd love to help.