

Empowering Staff Accountability

We often hear executive directors and other managers say they want their staff to be more accountable and to be more responsible. There is a tendency to perceive some flaw in the employee. Yet, having staff be "more accountable" begins with managers and the environment they create. In fact, staff can (and will) only be as accountable as managers are willing to let them be accountable.

In this issue we will examine what we mean by "being accountable," why it matters and an approach for making it a reality.

What We Mean By "Being Accountable"

"Accountable" and "responsible" are often used interchangeably. Indeed, dictionaries define one in terms of the other. Interestingly, both terms often have a certain connotation of guilt, duty, burden and even punishment, as in: "She's responsible for our not making that target." Or, "I know he's accountable for that mistake."

This thinking confuses the matter and can lead in unproductive directions. So, the first

step is to define our terms.

In our view, "being accountable" means being someone who can be *counted on* to do or to produce **something**. Being accountable means, fundamentally, being count-on-able for a result. The key distinction is owning it, being committed to the result no matter what. It's as simple as: "Yes, you can count on me to do that." As a manager, I can then hold that person to account for what they said they would do.

When you are accountable and responsible the facts are simply the facts, useful feedback, not something to be denied, avoided or feared. In essence, being accountable is nothing more or less than recognizing the facts of the matter *without judgement or assessment*. You could call it acknowledging what's so.

Bottom-line: As managers what we really want are staff members who are producing results and growing as professionals in the process.

Empowering Accountability is Not Delegating

There is a difference between

"Define the right outcomes and then let each person find his own route towards those outcomes."

Marcus Buckingham & Curt Coffman, *First, Break All the Rules*.

Questions & Answers

How Do I Get My Point Across Without Offending?

1. Before delivering a difficult communication, take the time to identify:

- The purpose of your communication
- All of the results you intend to achieve, including the relationship you will have when all is said and done.

2. When you consider these elements, you may notice that you have several different, yet consistent, intentions. Organize these different pieces into a conversation that allows each one of you to be truly heard and you will have a basis for a successful communication.

3. Set up the meeting. Take time to ensure that your communication can be heard. Begin with your overall intention or commitment. Establish the

framework of shared commitment that allows both of you to consider all parts of what needs to be discussed.

4. One useful technique for developing successful communications is to ask yourself, "What would I need to hear in order to respond openly and constructively in this situation?" While you won't tap into a "blueprint" or set of rules, you WILL identify an approach that is far more likely to succeed!



3910 N. Blackhawk Road • Silver City, NM 88061
Tel: (505) 534-2121 • Fax: (505) 388-1016
E-mail: nonprofit@effenv.com



Published by: effective environments
Editor: Gary Yates
Call or email us for your free subscription.

Copyright effective environments 2002



An Invitation -- Design 2003 Workshop

As Peter Drucker says, "The best way to predict the future is to invent it."

Join us for a one-day workshop in which you will establish a framework for an outrageously successful 2003. You will acknowledge your accomplishments in 2002, design your key accomplishments for 2003, and

begin to define the support structures you need to achieve them.

This work is best done in an environment that allows for reflection and vision. The work of designing a new year benefits hugely from the support of other people engaged in the same process.

Join us for a day of invention and create an extraordinary 2003!

Saturday, January 18, 2003
9:00 AM - 4:30 PM
Location to be announced
Tuition: \$100

Space is limited. **To register, call effective environments at (707) 433-4055.**

Investing in People

Often, it seems like the fastest way to get something done is to do it yourself! YOU know how you want it done and how to do it. Finding someone else to do it and then ensuring they are set up to succeed looks like an ineffective use of your time and energy.

It may seem counter-intuitive to take time to turn a job or project over to someone else. Nevertheless, it is usually the most strategic way to proceed.

By investing in the people who work with us, we develop them as assets and as partners. By empowering them to be accountable, we heighten their abilities, their self-confidence and their level of performance. In the long run, investing in people is a "trimtab" -- a highly leveraged use of time and energy that repays itself in a multitude of benefits.

Accountability -- page 2

holding people to account (managing for accountability) and delegating. Delegating involves allowing or authorizing someone to represent you or act on your behalf. In practice, it also involves assigning tasks on a piecemeal basis, without relinquishing ownership. The scope is limited and creativity and leadership are not encouraged. Empowering people to be accountable really means that you are willing to give the job away completely, and then make sure the person has the wherewithall to succeed.

Why Accountability Is Important

Empowering people to be accountable is the key to effective management and achieving organizational objectives. When you manage for results (rather than managing the process) and empower accountability, you have enormous opportunity to:

- Foster an environment where people can be creative and can contribute
- Support on-going growth and development of staff through experience and specific training
- Free yourself from having all the answers or to control all the pieces of work
- Develop yourself as a leader, and manage from the vision and mission of the organization.

In addition, your staff will have an experience of being trusted and valued, and will truly own the project or work to be done.

How to Manage (Not Abdicate)

Empowering staff to be accountable begins with you, the manager, being willing to let your staff be accountable. This requires you to operate from confidence and trust in your staff. Without sufficient confidence and trust, you will find yourself parceling out tasks and making decisions that affect someone's accountability without including them. In short, you will micro-manage. Beginning with a commitment to the growth and development of the people you manage is fundamental.

Next, recognize that your role is to provide an environment that fosters accountability. Your fulfillment of this role is ongoing and will be multi-faceted. At all stages, remember that "managing for results" calls for a shift in focus from process to people. You are no longer managing HOW people do their jobs. You are intent on assuring that they have what they need to do their jobs and then, without disappearing or losing interest in their progress, getting out of the way.

In empowering people to be accountable and get the job done, you will be using (and encouraging others to use) relationship-building, planning skills, organizational skills and leadership. You will be supporting problem-solving, increasing levels of trust and confidence in the people you manage and expressing your commitment to their success and to their growth and development. You will be ensuring that the organizational resources they need to do their jobs are allocated and made available in a timely manner.

Accountability -- page 3

An environment that fosters accountability will also include specific practices, such as regular performance reviews in which initiative, creativity and accountability are rewarded.

The following are critical practices you can adopt to empower people to be accountable:

- Give away the ENTIRE job "up front". Lay out the work to be done with the person accountable. Let them know it's their work entirely -- you are counting on them to achieve the result and to design the way to achieve it.
- Ensure that *all* expected outcomes are clear and aligned on. Make sure that how you will measure success is clearly defined.
- Make sure that they are set up to succeed. Make a list of everything you think the person accountable would need to know or have in order to succeed.

The list may include:

- * A plan of action
- * Resources -- people, money, technology
- * New training or skills. Then ensure that the person accountable has a workable plan for getting what is needed in a timely manner.
- Set up regular meetings and/or reports. Identify what you need to be aware of what is going on. What reports would you want and how often? Spell it all out and agree on a reporting structure that works for both of you.
- Let the person know you are on his/her team as a resource and how you will participate.

• When problems arise, DO NOT step in and bail them out! Empower the person you are managing to assess with you what is working and what isn't working and to propose solutions. Step into avert certain disaster, if you must, but be willing to allow mistakes to happen. When you correct performance, frame your corrections in terms of growth and development.

Stand for peoples' success, accept only their best and acknowledge the triumphs.

"Making the transformation from micromanagement to participative management first requires a change of spirit. It will require the manager to make the transformation from a style that emphasizes excessive control to one that trusts others to carry out their assignments..."

Mark Eppler, *Management Mess-ups*.

Tips for Effectiveness

1. Create and work from monthly and weekly priorities for individuals and for the group. A priority is the most leveraged action(s) this week or this month that will lead to delivering on a long-term accomplishment.

Advantages of working from priorities include:

- Providing a method and a structure for generating department-wide priorities

• Providing a framework for individuals to identify their priorities consistent with the long-term objectives of the organization

• Monitoring the status of individual projects on a weekly and monthly basis and providing feedback for employee performance evaluation, and

• Encouraging a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction

on an individual and department-wide basis.

2. Insist on **complete work** from yourself and from your staff. Complete work means tying up all the loose ends around a task. Communicate the status of a task to the appropriate person: (a) when you are done, (b) when you need to change the deadline, or (c) when you know you will not do what you promised. Honesty and clarity empower success!