

DEEP ACCOUNTABILITY: THE POWER OF AGREEMENT

By David Irvine, Best-Selling Author and Leader's Navigator

You can't build a reputation on what you are going to do.

—HENRY FORD

Everyone's saying it: business needs to be accountable. That includes leaders, employees and organizations. So why do most accountability programs fail?

The concept and experience of accountability needs rejuvenation. You have to get to the deep meaning of accountability. You have to be clear about who you are accountable to, "for what specific results," and "for what matters most." If you aren't, accountability becomes just another organizational buzzword, or worse, a hammer to punish people.

Accountability, when understood and applied effectively, will transform the relationships in your life.

Accountability is defined as *the ability to be counted on*. There are three critical pieces to the Accountability puzzle:

1. Maturity

Maturity is a foundational prerequisite for the development of an accountable person. In an old quote book of my mother's, I found this definition of maturity, probably written in my grandparents' generation when accountability was more ubiquitous:

Maturity is:

*The ability to do a job without being supervised,
To finish a job once it is started,
To carry money without spending it,
And to be able to bear an injustice without wanting to get even.*

No leadership philosophy or approach, no matter how superb and eloquent, can compensate for a lack of individual maturity — the accountability of every employee in an organization.

2. Personal Integrity

"No one but you cares about the reason you let someone down," my friend Jerry Weinberg says. Personal integrity, another cornerstone of accountability, involves two things. First, you only promise what you you will deliver, and second, you deliver on your promises. If you make a promise knowing that you lack the resources, capability, and desire to fulfill it, you breach your integrity which in turn, diminishes self-respect and erodes respect and trust in the workplace. Remember, it is better to under promise and over deliver, than to over promise and under deliver.

3. Clear Agreements

There are five key elements necessary to make an agreement powerful and meaningful with the people you depend on and who depend on you.

Contribution statement — What is the highest level value you are committed to bring to this relationship?

Accountabilities — Accountabilities are the promises you make to others, what they can count on from you. There are two kinds of accountabilities: a) *Operational* Accountabilities, the no-excuse *results* that you promise to deliver, and b) *Leadership* Accountabilities, the values that you will be held accountable for living, that is, the kind of culture and relationships you are committed to build and person you promise to be. All accountabilities are accompanied by short term goals and meaningful measures.

Support requirements — Support requirements are the accountabilities you require from others to ensure that you will have the support necessary to fulfill your accountabilities.

Consequences — Consequences describe the results of the agreement (such as what you would like from others in return for delivering on your accountabilities). They are a statement of what is important to you, considering what is fair and reasonable within your current environment.

Follow-up — Follow-up is a statement that indicates how your agreement will be maintained as a meaningful and flexible document over time, a work in progress.

Accountability is about getting a grip on results. It's about creating trust in relationships so the relationship will last. It's about courageous conversations, about making clear promises that you will deliver on and the courage to hold people to what they say they will do. It's about engaging people and breathing new life into the relationships that matter. It is a deep and sustaining way to renew organizations with a promise and a commitment to what matters most, and to bring the very best you have to offer to whatever you do.

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David Irvine is sought after internationally as a speaker, author, and mentor. His work has contributed to the building of accountable, vital, and engaged organizations across North America. He is the co-founder of the Newport Institute for Authentic Living whose focus is to build authentic organizational cultures that attract and retain great people. David is the best selling author of five books. His most recent book is *Bridges Of Trust: Making Accountability Authentic*. These are available in bookstores or can be ordered at www.davidirvine.com

For information on how David can bring value to your organization, contact david@davidirvine.com or call 1-866-621-7008 (toll free).