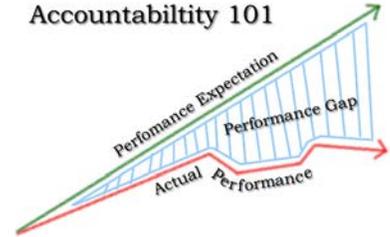


Accountability Is About Correcting Performance Gaps – Not Punishment

If you ask 100 people to say the first thing that comes to mind when they hear the word **Accountability**, I believe the majority would reply with words to the effect of **Punishment**.

Today we'll look at the difference between **Accountability** and **Punishment** and how we, as leaders, can set people up for success and effectively address any performance gaps that may arise.



Accountability is about correcting a performance gap that develops between an expectation and actual performance.

Punishment is about retribution and deterrence, but it often does little to discover the reason for the gap or correct actual performance.

Begin By Setting People Up For Success

- **Ensure the plan and expectations are understood.** Begin by asking and answering these questions:
 - *What needs to be done?*
 - *What will success look like?*
 - *Who is going to do what and by when?*
 - *How and at what intervals will we communicate along the way?*
- **Provide adequate resources.** An unfunded/underfunded mandate is one of the quickest ways to create a performance gap. As a leader, I must provide the people, equipment, material, supplies, and time required to meet expectations. Additionally, I must make myself available to the team for questions and guidance.
- **Check for understanding and feasibility.** *Is everyone clear and on board with the plan, resources, and expectations?* If not, the leader must clarify and/or adjust.
- **Check progress and quality regularly. Accountability cadence (rhythm) leads to Accountability acceptance.** *Does your team expect you to evaluate performance and address performance gaps as a part of your routine?* If not, you've got a fundamental leadership problem. Fix it by regularly scheduling performance update meetings and reinforcing the point that the purpose of the update is to address performance gaps – not punish those involved.

Hold the Accountability Conversation

- **Check your mind and heart – don't assume the worst about your team.** If I assume the worst about others, it can lead me down an argumentative, unproductive road that could increase the performance gap. Instead, I need to approach the situation with an open mind and heart, willing to listen to my team's perspective.
- **Review the plan and expectation.** *Did something change in the team's understanding?* Understanding can shift as execution and outcomes begin to interact with the team's working reality. Revisiting the plan and expectation lays a solid foundation for identifying and closing the performance gap.
- **Describe the gap.** Use a positive tone and body language and stick to the *Facts* – things you have observed and/or measured. For example, instead of saying, *"Joe, I think you're laying down on the job."* Try something along the lines of, *"Joe, our team has delivered three of the required milestones on time, and that's a good thing, but I'm getting some questions from operations about our ability to deliver the two upcoming milestones on time, and they have also raised concerns about our quality as it relates to operational reliability. They seem to be having to take two of the systems we delivered offline every four days to repair them. Can you help me understand your working reality and your thoughts on operation's concerns?"* Then close your mouth and open your ears.
- **Get input about the gap.** *Is there agreement that there's gap?* If not, explore *Alternative Facts* and the *Assessment of Performance*. Once there is agreement, then it's important determine what caused the gap. *Was there an unexpected change in scope or conditions? Were there inadequate or unexpected results from the resources provided?* Once the team understands the cause, it's time to brainstorm ways to close the gap.
- **Develop a joint plan to correct the gap.** Once the plan to close the gap is developed and communicated to everyone involved, the leader must ensure that everyone is clear and on board with the corrective measures. The key question here is, *who is going to do what and by when?*

Regardless of your industry or team composition, **Accountability** is a fundamental key to consistent achievement. I hope this short-version of Accountability 101, will help you and your team find greater success in all your endeavors.

If you would like additional resources on this topic, I recommend:

- [Crucial Conversations](#) and [Crucial Accountability](#), by [VitalSmarts](#)
- [The Four Disciplines of Execution](#), by Chris McChesney, Sean Covey, and Jim Huling