Toward a culture of team accountability
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Despite many well-intentioned efforts to create more accountability in organizations, many leaders still struggle to make it a reality.

Mediocrity, lack of execution, missed deadlines and deliverables are all hallmarks of teams that avoid accountability, and they are the precursors to a persistent lack of organizational results.

Most of us think of accountability as inherently top-down, where the boss holds people's feet to the fire to ensure they deliver. While this is an important part of accountability, it is not enough to create a culture of accountability.

The most effective and accountable teams enforce a peer-to-peer accountability, where team members are so committed to what they are trying to achieve that they are willing to remind each other when they are not living up to the agreed-upon standards of performance and behavior of the team or organization.

This level of commitment necessitates that goals and standards be developed by the team in a way that ensures everyone participates, agrees and is clear. It's a lot harder to hold people accountable for something that is unclear or where they don't buy in.

Holding people accountable is one of the most uncomfortable and difficult things for most people to do - even leaders. Most of us avoid confronting other people - especially when it involves their behavior, and this is the single most important reason why cultures of accountability fail to be established.

Confronting Unproductive Behavior
Often, in cases where someone has been ultimately fired or removed for a lack of results, we can see a pattern of unproductive behavior that preceded the lack of results.

Unfortunately, most leaders wait to take action until the company is already negatively impacted rather than address the behaviors that eventually led to the lack of results.

It's much easier to fire someone for lack of results than it is to confront people on their unproductive behaviors before it becomes a major problem. This is why many people that have been fired often say they never saw it coming - and had they known they were doing something unproductive, they probably would have tried to remedy it.

One prominent senior scientist in a biotech organization was very well known in his field and brought status and prestige to the company. He also ran a significant business unit. Despite his prominence, the scientist was widely known within the organization to be uncooperative and difficult to work with.
As an example, he refused to return voice mail messages from anyone, including the CEO and customers. Rather than confront the scientist on his behavior, the frustrated CEO had the scientist's voice mail disconnected, assuming this would get his attention.

Rather than get the message the CEO had intended however, the scientist was instead delighted that he no longer had to deal with voice mails.

After three years of allowing the scientist's unproductive behavior, the company began missing its growth targets, and the scientist's business unit began to lose key customers and failed to perform to its potential.

The CEO ultimately removed him from his role for lack of results, yet never directly confronted him about the behavior that caused it.

**Building Accountability on Your Team**

Here are a few strategies that can help you build a strong culture of accountability.

1. Clearly establish and publish performance goals and behavior standards for the team. Collectively and publicly clarify exactly what needs to be achieved, who needs to deliver what, and how everyone must behave in order to succeed.

2. Establish simple measures and monitoring systems to track progress at regularly scheduled staff meetings.

3. Confront difficult behavior and performance issues head on as they arise.

4. Publicly declare results. Teams that are willing to commit publicly to specific results are more likely to work with a passionate desire to achieve those results.

5. Establish results-based rewards. An effective way to ensure that team members focus their attention on collective results is to tie their rewards, especially compensation, to the achievement of specific team outcomes, versus individual outcomes.

Often in organizations where a lack of accountability exists, it is because there is a lack of clarity and buy-in around priorities, as well as a lack of human systems and follow-through to support that clarity.

Addressing these issues within your team can create a strong culture of accountability and create exceptional results.