

the context we intended. Such general acknowledgements and assumptions are not an indication of clarity. They lead to potential failure.

Make Agreements Explicit:The simplest agreement answers the question; who will do what by when? If these conditions are not established there is no agreement, leaving lots of room for breakdowns. The more detail there is in an agreement the more likely you are to get what you expect. The best agreements answer the question; Who will do what by when with whom at what level of measurable quality, detail and completion? Parties to an agreement should also know why the agreement is being made, allowing them to understand the impact of their performance on the overall goal. Explicit agreements must be used whenever there is a possibility for misunderstanding, a high cost of failure, and where there are interrelated dependencies. This means, almost always. Clear explicit agreements create true accountability.

Negotiate for Clarity:Agreements should flow out of negotiation. Even if you require a specific non-negotiable deadline or deliverable, you want to encourage negotiation on other points because the dialogue identifies critical details and obstacles in delivering the result. If there is no negotiation everyone will end up being victims of their own self-deception and miss important factors that negatively impact the desired result.

Ask for Confirmation:Agreements need to be confirmed. If you are working with someone who usually delivers on their commitments the confirmation can be more casual. If you are depending on someone who frequently fails to deliver, then your agreement has to be formal. Ask the person to repeat the agreement before they leave the negotiation or have them send you an email to confirm the details of the agreement. You can generate the email, asking other parties to confirm with a reply. You may be uncomfortable with this kind of request but better discomfort up front than disappointment and delay on the back end. This is not micro-management. It is accountability in action.

Renegotiate Early:Even with agreements, people fail to deliver. Stuff happens that is beyond our control and inevitably it is necessary to renegotiate. Renegotiating is fair as long as it is not on the day of the deadline or after the date has passed. One approach is to include an early warning date in your initial negotiation; one that calls for notification before the deadline if the terms of the agreement will not be met. Another is to ask participants in an agreement to check in for regular status reports on specific dates.

Track Commitments: Anyone who is party to an agreement is accountable for tracking those commitments. In some way you have to calendar commitments or have someone do it for you. Some people have their administrative assistants do the tracking. They call people a week in advance to ask if they will deliver on time. If not, the admin gets a new commitment and confirms acceptance with the boss. In one case when this system was initiated, delivery went from 30% to almost 100% overnight.

Hold People Accountable: If you don't hold people accountable they know it and they don't take seriously the agreements they have with you. Holding people accountable takes managerial courage. When parties to an agreement fail to deliver, you immediately ask questions. "What was your intention when you made the agreement with me? What happened? Do you understand the impact of your failure on other people and on interrelated projects, jobs and goals?" If they don't see the consequences explain it to them in detail. "Do you care about these consequences?" Lead failure to learning and new commitments. "What did you learn from this experience? What will you do the next time you make an agreement with me?" And don't ask why they didn't deliver. It only generates excuses. There has to be a cost to the other person if they don't take their agreements seriously. If nothing else, it is the discomfort of self evaluation. Then renegotiate. "What can you agree to now?"

Shorten the Leash with Low Performers: If you are working with someone who repeatedly fails to deliver you shorten the leash. In your initial agreements you work with them to break down the commitment into milestones with separate dates and completion parameters for each. If you have tried this already, add milestones and shorten the time frames for reporting. If they continue to fail at least you know early and can seek other ways to get the job done. If possible, avoid working with people who repeatedly fail to deliver. If you have to work with them and cannot influence change, take some action to let others in leadership know what is happening. This again requires managerial courage.

Acknowledge Success: When agreements are kept, acknowledge the value of what was produced. If you want to lead high performance and foster a trusting environment for learning put as much focus on success as on broken agreements

Use the System: This is the system of agreement that leads to accountability. The most effective way to put the system to work is to model what you expect of others.

guidance for creating accountability in your organization, please call us or click on a signature below to contact any of the three partners at ChoiceWorks Inc.

Sincerely,

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