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How to create accountability in your company sales culture

Denver Business Journal - by [Garry Duncan](#)

How accountable are you and your sales team?

Generally, because of our culture's desire for comfort, personal accountability gets lip service, and organizations are reluctant to hold anyone truly accountable. The current trend of flattening power structures and democratizing companies by driving decisions down to the lowest level also inhibits accountability.

When an organization tries to reach consensus without individual accountability, then finger pointing, blaming, anger, job dissatisfaction and chaos are bound to occur. Accountability requires that each team member do their part to benefit the team.

Accountability comes from within. It's not something you can give to someone, and means personal actions are associated with outcomes and results.

It's difficult to hold people accountable to a group or department, which don't look someone in the eye and say, "You did not meet expectations." Only individuals can do that.

Understanding relationships is important to those who have to hold others accountable. Think of strong and healthy personal relationships. They're the epitome of honesty, directness, trust, conflict, confidence and willingness for self-disclosure drive for common goals.

Conflict, you might ask? It's a key to strong relationships. It's a sign of investment in others, and shows you can say what needs to be said instead of only what others hope to hear. Conflict is associated with hostility, but it doesn't have to be that way.

Likewise, directness, honesty, hearing what you need to hear, conflict and conflict resolution are all part of healthy business relationships.

There are signs that a seller or sales team lacks personal accountability. Those signs are victimization, procrastination, reactive thinking and entitlement.

- Victimization sounds like "They are the problem," or "If it weren't for," or "If only I could." This attitude comes from a feeling that influences are outside of personal control.
- Procrastination is often a symptom of the fear of failure. This sounds like "Sorry, I was too busy," or "I didn't have time." To eliminate fear of failure, replace reprimands with a lesson-learned culture

when mistakes occur.

Lessons learned can benefit all team members by increasing confidence and instilling a can-do attitude, and creates positive awareness of how you deal with mistakes in the workplace.

- Reactive thinking is a symptom of believing experiences are unrelated to personal actions and decisions. You know this is the problem when you hear frequent responses such as, "I am not responsible," or "There is nothing I could do about it," or "I did not know what to do."

Proactive thinking, on the other hand, a key component of accountability, anticipates the pitfalls before they occur.

- Entitlement is a way of thinking that we're due something regardless of individual efforts.

To create a culture of accountability, follow these steps:

- Transfer decision power to the salesperson, as much as possible -- Responsibility improves when positive and negative outcomes are associated with our own decisions.
- Teach problem-solving skills -- Develop them by having salespeople clearly define problems, and teach how to collect and analyze information, determine options, and assess the best and worst possible outcome of each option.
- Stop rescuing your salespeople -- Managers commonly rescue their salespeople when questions, answers or presentations are going poorly. It's much better for sellers to learn the consequences of poor interview questions, weak presentations or not knowing correct answers. Only then will they learn to be accountable for their actions.

Parents who let children live with their choices are training accountability. The same is true for sales managers.

- Treat mistakes as a learning opportunity -- Selling requires taking risks, so risk is encouraged. Failures become a learning experience and an opportunity to grow.

Lessons learned are the best teachers. Of course, if the same mistake occurs consistently, consequences are in order.

- Empower your team by setting clear expectations, with consistent, frequent feedback -- For example, if you expect reports to be on time, give positive feedback when they're on time, not just negative feedback when they're late. The consistency teaches that what you ask for is important, and there will be follow-up.

Open, direct relationships, positive and negative consequences combined with a lesson-learned culture are key components to building a team inspired with individual accountability.

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