



MEASURE TWICE, CUT ONCE

Workplace accountability builds resilient teams

BY CAROL L. BROOKS, SR/WA

The carpentry proverb, “Measure twice, cut once,” encourages a double-check on measurements for accuracy before cutting a piece of wood; otherwise it may be necessary to cut again, wasting time and material. This same proverb applies to workplace accountability where each member of the team makes a concerted effort to ensure their deliverables are accurate and on time—all the time. But how many times have you been disappointed because someone who you had relied upon didn’t come through? They didn’t keep their commitment or they didn’t deliver and thus, you couldn’t deliver. And if you did, you nearly turned yourself inside out to complete your assignment.



Putting your best foot forward is a serious matter, especially for team members who not only rely on your service or product, but can't start their assignment until you have completed yours. Taking a bit more time to "measure twice, cut once" is representative of who you are, your values and what you bring to the team. Here are a few tips to heighten the accountability barometer on your deliverables.

Accountability and Trust

Trust and accountability are closely connected and inseparable. If you keep your promises, admit to your mistakes and take responsibility, both trust and accountability increase. Not every promise can be kept, nor every commitment met, but the willingness to confront reality and make adjustments can create a mutually accountable relationship between you and your team.

Involvement

To be accountable, a team has to agree to what is being asked of them. If a target is imposed without their collective consent and buy-in, it will be a challenge to maintain team accountability.

But what about targets imposed on us from corporate, which we don't have a say in or a chance to argue about? The reality is that sometimes our consent is implied because we are an employee of an organization. This is in the same way that you must follow the laws of the country in which you live or visit without signing a document saying you agree to do so.

In these situations where targets are imposed and not negotiated, the key is to explain the why—the importance of what is being asked and give the team freedom to figure out how to best meet their goal.

Stimulated through Leadership

Team leads should "inspect what they expect" by consistently checking on team results to see if expectations are being met.

Reinforce and acknowledge the good and also comment, question and correct the bad. Clarify the expectations again if situations change or if there is apparent confusion. Focus on individual accountability to ensure everyone understands their function and their deliverables. Remember, when we are all accountable, nobody owns the task. This is why it's important to be specific. What you don't want is a situation where team members say, "I thought (someone else) was doing it!" To improve accountability, choose one person. "Bob, you are accountable for making sure the letters go out on time." This tells Bob that he is the one in charge of this task. When things go wrong, Bob knows he needs to fix it. Bob knows if he doesn't do it, nobody else is going to.

Task Ownership

Accountability gives people a greater sense of ownership over their work. When someone feels greater responsibility, they often feel personal pride, making them care more about the quality of their work. This level of commitment becomes

evident through improved motivation, enthusiasm and greater dedication to the team.

Accountability in Your Job

Think about what triggers accountability in your job performance. For me, it's that whisper of my inner voice that calls my attention to a short cut that I'm contemplating. It warns me that measuring only once can mean additional work when having to cut twice and that the best performance is the right performance.

You may be thinking that it takes time to measure twice, but the time saved and a chance to reduce your stress is worth the few minutes it takes to guarantee you are consistently putting your best foot forward. Without accountability, people won't take ownership and make sure their work is done right. Let's put our best foot forward and rally to the mantra, "measure twice, cut once" to promote team accountability and to escalate our performance to a higher level of excellence and job satisfaction. ✪



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