

ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH AGREEMENT

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One of management's most crucial tasks is to get people to be accountable for producing results. Traditionally, the way bosses have tried to get workers to produce desired results is to use fear of punishment for non-performance – **coercion**. The idea is, if you scare them enough they will perform. Using coercion as a motivator has been, and still is, a favorite of many bosses, probably because it is quite effective. People do indeed press harder at their work when they believe they will be punished if they don't. Distress or pain avoidance is the motive. However, there is a powerful down-side to coercion as a primary motivation tool. People, after a while, resent and resist coercion, even if it is fairly applied. If it is unfairly applied, they get upset even faster. Also, if the boss stops scaring people, even for a brief period (e.g. goes to a meeting, conference, or vacation), folks tend to slow down or stop performing almost immediately (while the cat's away, the mice will play). Distress when sustained long enough to affect individual workers, also tends to cause low morale, depression, even disease.

Fortunately, there is a different way for leaders to motivate people to perform – **agreement**. For genuine agreement to form, leaders must inform workers of what results are desired in a manner that captures their attention and releases their energies on behalf of the goals. People need leaders to communicate with them, share their vision of the desired results, help them to work well together with others, provide the tools and resources necessary for success, create work processes and systems that make it easy for them to be effective and efficient, and recognize their contributions and achievements. When leaders behave in these ways, people often will not only accept their part in agreements for performance, they will seek out opportunities to work under conditions of challenge and *eustress* – positive achievement. Qualities for leader behavior that are required for making genuine and informed agreements with workers include:

- Clear vision, goals, and values, or willingness to get clear.
- Enthusiastic energy focused appropriately on goals or on process to specify goals.
- Detailed understanding about what it will take to be successful and what obstacles could interfere with optimum achievement or willingness to develop such understanding.
- Imaginative and inclusive about how to proceed; open to ideas for success from all contributors; aware of boundaries and able to transform them when appropriate to achieve goals.
- Empowering of other people who are in agreement and aligned with goals; shares power, authority, and responsibility appropriately; expects and values individual initiative; learns from legitimate mistakes; rewards performance; corrects defects.

When people work from agreement, it is in everyone's enlightened self interest:

- to seek agreement on mutually acceptable terms (achieving win-win accord);
- to clarify the terms of the agreements and understand them the same way (gaining alignment);
- to keep agreements whenever possible (building mutual confidence);
- to change agreements when necessary (valuing flexibility and empathy);
- to avoid breaking agreements (actively avoiding blame and defensiveness); and
- to accept responsibility for "making it right" whenever an agreement has been broken (feel genuine regret and initiate corrective action without being asked).

Therefore, having skill at negotiating agreements is necessary for all members of the organization or team. In negotiation, it must be assumed that all parties, workers and leaders, have power as individuals. (Without power, a person comes to the negotiating table as a beggar, not as a negotiator.) Power is regarded as everyone's right and a necessary condition for building effective agreements. Workers *want* leaders to have power so they can believe in their vision and capacity for achievable direction; leaders *want* workers to have power so they can count on their ability to deliver on their agreements with self-directed initiative that will produce the desired results. Negotiating for what we want from each other is a normal and on-going process in an agreement-centered organization. With perfect practice, the negotiation process can become both effective at producing workable agreements and efficient as a way of clarifying who will do what to achieve goals.

A final thought: you may have noticed that **not all people are**:

- **responsive to being challenged** (they avoid striving; just don't want to work that hard);
- **willing to enter into voluntary agreements to produce results** (they want to avoid unambiguous accountability for their performance);
- **able to focus their energies through their own volition and/or initiatives** (they need direction from outside to focus their attention on goals);
- **sufficiently developed in their own integrity to accept full responsibility for their behavior** (they tend to blame others for their problems in producing results against goals; they feel like victims at the effect of others' behavior).

In these cases, it may be necessary, even appropriate, for a leader to provide more structured direction for results-oriented behavior and specific consequences for non-performance by the worker. In the degree that this more autocratic style can also leave room for agreement-based performance to be developed at a later time or in a different aspect of work, there will be important advantages to doing so, as have been outlined above. But, in the meantime, work must get done. So, try agreement building first with as many as possible. Then, with those who just don't get it, give them the direction they need to focus their energies on achieving the necessary results. Along the way, help them to see the advantages of working on their own volition through agreements by recognizing and rewarding those who do. As soon as the reluctant ones indicate they are ready, offer the opportunity to shift their pattern from only responding to the directions you give to the more growth-oriented pattern of achievement through agreement.