



## UNIT-13 Employee Accountability

### Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

- ✓ Understand what accountability is and what events in history have shaped our view of it
- ✓ Identify the requirements for personal and corporate accountability
- ✓ Apply the cycle of accountability and the fundamental elements required to build an accountable organization
- ✓ Describe what individuals must do to become accountable
- ✓ Build skills required for accountability, including goal setting, giving and receiving feedback, and delegation
- ✓ Pinpoint ways to build ownership in your organization
- ✓ Isolate areas for further self-improvement

## Unit 13

### Employee Accountability

#### Defining Accountability

#### What is Accountability?

##### Defining Accountability

The Encarta Dictionary defines accountability as, “responsible to somebody or for something,” or as, “capable of being explained.”

In a business sense, accountability is about being true to your word. It is also about being true to yourself and your personal expectations.

Accountability is an individual value. Real accountability cannot be forced; it must be voluntary. However, although accountability is really up to your individual employees, it is up to you to put the tools in their hands so that they can fulfill their potential.

##### Why the Focus on Accountability?

Over the past decade, more and more people have been called to answer for their actions. (We’ll look at the reasons for this in a moment.) Institutions which shape society seem less and less accountable, and the phenomenon can be seen all over the world.

A 2012 poll by Gallup (an organization that specializes in research about human beliefs and behavior) found that confidence in the United States government was extremely low. Only 37% of respondents said that they had quite a lot or a great deal of trust in the American presidency. (This is compared to 72% in 1991, and 52% in 1975, the year after Watergate.)

(Source: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1597/confidence-institutions.aspx>)

The Results Are In

Another Gallup study conducted in 2012 asked participants to rate how much confidence they had in various American institutions. Their options were: a great deal, quite a lot, some, or very little. The results were:

Institution	A great deal of trust	Quite a lot of trust
The military	43	32
Small businesses	30	33
Police	26	30
Church/organized religion	25	19
Medical system	20	21
The presidency	17	20
United States Supreme Court	15	22
Public schools	11	18
Television news	11	10
Organized Labor (e.g. unions)	11	10
Criminal justice system	11	18
Newspapers	10	15
Banks	9	12
Big business	9	12
Health maintenance organizations (HMOs)	8	11
Congress	6	7

(Source: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1597/confidence-institutions.aspx>)

## The Era of Distrust

So how did we get here? Did we just stop having faith in our society around the year 2000? Or did our institutions suffer a massive fail in accountability all at once? The answer actually goes back several decades. Although many of the trends mentioned here are based on the United States, we see similarities across the globe.

### 1960's

In the post-war era, people started to advocate social change. Rights movements and advances in medicine improved the quality of life for many people, particularly groups that were disadvantaged at the time.

At this time, the media (including the newly popular television) began promoting the idea that every American was entitled to happiness, primarily through material things. Fulfillment was no longer something that you worked directly for (for example, by plowing the field all day) but something that you purchased, or that was handed to you as a result of some turn of fortune.

"If you try to think where we went wrong, it was in delinking rights and responsibilities," says Roger Conner, the former director of the American Alliance for Rights and Responsibilities (now called the Center for Community Interest). "People are fixated on their rights but they have a shriveled sense of responsibility, so if they don't have what they want, they assume it must be someone else's fault."

### 1970's

As flower children were supplanted by people on roller skates, the rights movement took on a grotesque transformation that no one could have predicted. Changes in the legal system (such as a broader definition of negligence, a legalization of ambulance-chasing, and a looser definition of an expert witness) resulted in many ridiculous court cases and an exponential increase in money spent on litigation. Suddenly, people could blame almost everyone for their ill fortune, whether it was the refrigerator company that didn't warn against strapping their product onto one's back and running a race with it, or the variety of illnesses, syndromes, complexes, and compulsions that popped up. Almost any circumstance could lead to victimization, including dropping things on yourself, or your mother having PMS while she raised you.

At the same time, talk shows like Phil Donohue got started, evolving into even more popular voyeuristic stylings of Geraldo Rivera, Sally Jessy Raphael, and Oprah Winfrey of the 1980's. These shows focused on extracting confessions from people, and the wilder the confession, the greater the applause, the more focused the attention, and the higher the ratings. People were rewarded for bringing their problems to the forefront, and at times others were even more highly rewarded for exploiting these victims.

### 1980's and 1990's

The American society's notion of accountability and personal responsibility continued its downward spiral over the next two decades. More people became dependent on the social system, and more people blamed their problems on anyone but themselves. In a trend reminiscent of Victorian times, people were diagnosed with illnesses that seemed almost made-up.

In his book *Diseasing of America*, Stanton Peele says, "By revising notions of personal responsibility, our disease conceptions undercut moral and legal standards exactly at a time when we suffer most from a general loss of social morality. Disease notions...legitimize, reinforce, and excuse the behaviors in question - convincing people, contrary to all evidence, that their behavior is not their own."

Ridiculous lawsuits and outrageous criminal defenses continued to rampage through the legal system. One of the most famous examples is Dan White, who assassinated San Francisco Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk in 1978. White's defense is often referred to as "The Twinkie Defense" – he claimed that he had been temporarily insane due to depression, partially brought on by eating too much junk food. Although we cannot know what impact this had on his trial, White was sentenced to seven years in prison for his crimes and served only five.

### The First Years of 2000

In 1991, James Taylor published a piece in *New York Magazine* called, "Don't Blame Me!" Even then, he stated, "[Society's] well of guilt is running dry." By 2000, people had become fed up with overpaid CEO's and status figures that seemed exempt from the rules.

A look back at some notable scandals:

- **2001-2002:** Corporate giants Enron and Worldcom collapse when it is revealed that much of their financial success was based on cooking the books.
- **2003-2005:** Harry Stonecipher, CEO of Boeing, is ousted for affairs with employees.
- **2004:** Martha Stewart goes to jail for fraudulent stock trading.
- **2006:** David Edmondson, former RadioShack CEO, resigns after it is revealed that he falsified university degrees on his resume.
- **2007:** BP CEO John Browne is forced to resign after he lies to a court about how he met his boyfriend.
- **2007:** Major League Baseball star Barry Bonds breaks the league's home run record. Later that year he was indicted for perjury and obstructions of justice related to cases involving the use of performance-enhancing drugs.
- **2009-2010:** Golf superstar Tiger Woods' flawless public image is smashed when a late-night car crash reveals the less palatable personal side of the golf star.

## Lessons Learned

We've just taken a quick look at some of the events in history (particularly American history) that have gotten us where we are today – to a point where we are demanding accountability. In order for people to be really accountable, they must be responsible on both a personal and a corporate level.

**List some practices or characteristics that would encourage and discourage accountability for both individuals and corporations.**

	Encourage Accountability	Discourage Accountability
<b>For Individuals</b>		
<b>For Corporations</b>		

## Creating an Accountable Organization

### The Accountability Cycle

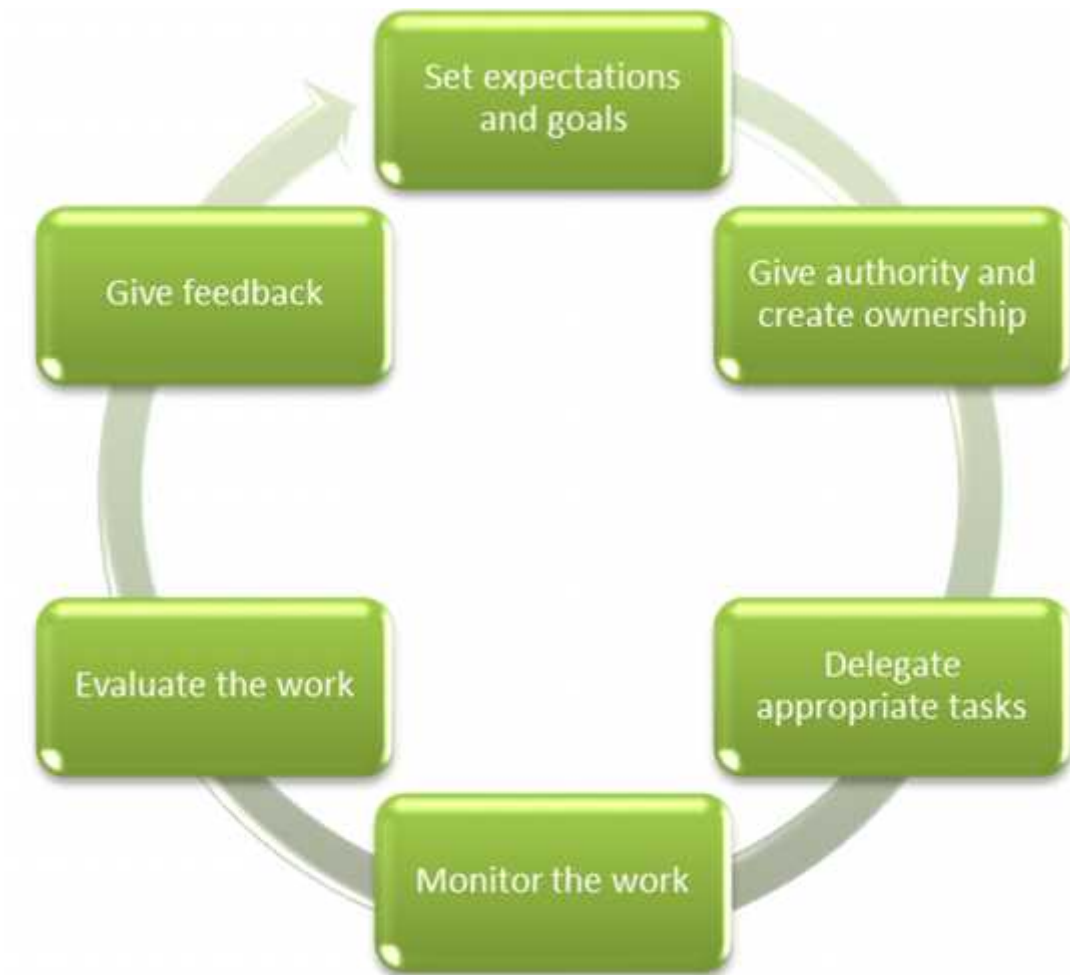
#### Key Characteristics

In order for an organization to be accountable, there must be a few key things in place:

- The organization as a whole must understand and commit to accountability.
- Accountability must start at the top and flow through the organization.
- Areas which have a lack of accountability must be addressed.
- Responsibility, authority, and employee engagement are closely tied to accountability.

#### The Accountability Cycle

Establishing, monitoring, and ensuring accountability is a continuous cycle:



### Ways to Increase Accountability

Accountability is a delicate balance of control, delegation, trust, and authority. In order to make people accountable, you must increase their authority, reduce the controls on them, delegate to them, trust them to do the job, and support them and give them the tools necessary to complete their task. After the job is done, they will be held accountable for the results.

In many situations, accountability and authority will be built slowly and simultaneously. The amount of responsibility and accountability will vary depending on the position, but you should expect a high level of accountability from everyone. For example, a housekeeping staff member may have a low level of responsibility and authority, but you would still want them to be 100% accountable for their work, just as the CEO is.

A lack of accountability in an organization is usually caused by a problem in the organization's structure, hence our frequent references to processes, rather than people. People do need particular skills and knowledge to be accountable, but these skills will be useless if your organization's processes do not ask them to be accountable.

### The Building Blocks

Five key elements must support this process.

#### Transparency

All processes in an organization must be as transparent as possible. Big questions, like how executive bonuses and raises are determined, have recently received a lot of attention. The basic process must be shared, and specific numbers should be made public. Encourage your employees to ask questions and give them honest answers. Wouldn't you expect the same from them?

#### Honesty

Demand honesty from all employees at all levels. Everyone should be accountable to someone. Ensure that employees have access to the information that they need to make decisions based on real-time information.

#### Credibility

Ensure employees are in a position where they can have credibility. Don't, for example, move a person from VP of production to VP of sales when they have no sales experience. Your staff (managers, leaders, and executives in particular) needs credibility to be accountable. They can build their credibility by sharing past, relevant experiences with staff, or do so yourself on the company website, through a memo, or in a newsletter.

#### Integrity

Integrity means following your values and being accountable day in and day out. It means acting consistently, so that people can rely on you, in good situations and in tough spots. Give your employees the support they need to be reliable in their values.

## Trust

Employees must trust each other to make honest decisions, to do good work, to generally act for the good of the company, and to be accountable for their decisions. Members of a company must also trust each other to ask questions and to test their accountability and reliability.

## Case Study

### Case Study

It was Thursday of a busy week and Henry Harris was just about ready to quit his job as marketing manager of Comic Clowns. It seemed like he couldn't count on anyone.

On Monday, he had asked Amanda, his head customer service representative, to call an upset customer and solve their problem. She told him that she had, but the customer had called today and said they hadn't heard from anyone in weeks! When Henry confronted Amanda she became defensive and said the customer was supposed to call her. He didn't know what the truth was, except that his upset customer had spent his money elsewhere.

Henry also had heard from a sales rep this morning that the new website guru hadn't graduated from the college he said he had. What was he supposed to do about that?

To top things off, the VP of Sales had just informed him that none of the reps had submitted last month's reports. They were supposed to be in two weeks ago!

Henry sat at his desk with his head in his hands. What was wrong with people these days?

### Questions

**Where did Henry go wrong?**

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**What should Henry do now?**

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## Accountability Starts with Me!

### Honesty

Be honest with yourself about your reasons and motivations for your actions. Be clear about the consequences and accept them graciously.

Try this: Carefully listen to everything you say for one day. How many times do you lie or fudge the truth? This exercise in honesty can be difficult, but the results are surprising. We tell white lies a lot to make ourselves and others feel better. Try developing other skills, like tact and diplomacy, so that you can be honest but still be polite and kind.

### Assertiveness

Developing your assertive side can really help you in your quest to become more accountable. Assertiveness is a word we tend to use without really understanding what it means. We sometimes picture assertive people as being inconsiderate and very demanding. Rather, assertive people express their feelings, needs, and opinions in a forthright manner. However, they stop short of the abrasive manner that is the hallmark of the aggressive person.

Often the best way to understand something is by comparison. People with poor self-esteem often have an inferiority complex. They choose passive responses to life. They feel helpless or insecure. They may feel put-upon and resentful, but have a difficult time saying “no.” They become defensive quickly.

On the other hand, people with low self-esteem may also be arrogant, pompous, and presumptuous and seem to have a superiority complex. They meet life in an aggressive way.

These people are on opposite ends of the same affliction: low self-esteem. They are people who don't like themselves very much. The assertive person is someone who communicates with others on the best of all possible levels, where there are no losers, fools, or enemies — just two people who are mutually trying to solve their problems.

Assertiveness is behavior that allows a person to express honest feelings in a straightforward way and to exercise personal rights without changing the rights of others. Assertive people feel positive about themselves and others. They are willing to give others a chance to be reasonable before using less positive tactics. They want to openly discuss problems based on facts and needs. Assertion is based on respect for you and respect for the other person.

### Responsibility

Once you have gotten a handle on being accountable to yourself, begin accepting responsibility when and where it is deserved. At the same time, do not be afraid to assign responsibility if it truly belongs to someone else.

Let's look at an example. John is the manager of the production department. Last Friday was the end of the month, and he didn't get his monthly report completed on time. At first, he thought, “It's all Mary's fault. She didn't get those sales figures to me until Thursday afternoon. If it weren't for that, I would have had my report done on time.”

After a minute, though, John thinks about it a little bit more. The truth was he hadn't done any work on the report until Friday morning. He hadn't even asked Mary for the figures until Wednesday afternoon. He probably could have gotten them out of the system himself if he had really tried. Sure, Mary probably could have gotten the figures to him faster, but he realized that there was a lot more he could have done to help himself.

### A Final Note

It can be hard to take the high road and be accountable for your actions, particularly if others around you don't choose the same path. It is not your place to preach or judge others, but you should act assertively and ask that they take responsibility for their actions. By being accountable to yourself and setting a good example for others, you may just see a change in the world around you. In any case, you'll feel good about yourself!

## Setting Goals and Expectations

### Tips and Tricks

In order for people to be accountable, they need to know what they are going to be accountable for! Two ways to do this are to set goals with employees and to communicate expectations in a structured way.

### SPIRIT

Each objective should be broken down into several small, achievable goals that will help you get where you want to go. Good goals should have SPIRIT!

#### **Specific**

Be specific about what you want or don't want to achieve. The result should be tangible and clearly described. "Finish a project" is ambiguous, whereas "Finish the warehouse reorganization" is specific.

#### **Prizes**

Reward yourself at different points in the goal, particularly if it's long term. If your goal is to develop a set of standard operating procedures to make your employees more independent and accountable, for example, you might have a small reward for each section that you complete and a larger reward at the end.

#### **Individual**

The goal must be something that you want to do. If your boss wants you to work on a project you have no interest in, you will find it difficult to engage. Find something – even if it is a small thing – to anchor yourself to the project and make it yours. For example, if you enjoy working with that particular team of people, or you will get to attend a conference in a different city, or perhaps the project itself makes the rest of your work easier to do, you can connect to it on an individual level.

#### **Review**

Review your progress periodically. Does the goal make sense? Are you stuck? Do you need to adjust certain parts of it?

**Inspiring**

Frame the goal positively. Make it fun to accomplish. You could make a poster of the end result, frame it, and post it on the wall.

**Time-Bound**

Give yourself a deadline for achieving the goal. If it's a big goal, split it into small parts and give yourself a deadline for each item.

**Create a goal with SPIRIT to help yourself become more accountable.**

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Structuring Expectations

If your desired outcome is too general for a specific goal, you can simply communicate your expectations. If you have a structure for these expectations it can help you make sure that you've got all the bases covered.

The following checklist can help you outline just what you expect and what the employee will be accountable for.

- How will the task be started? What will execution look like? (Remember, keep this as broad as possible. Giving the employee maximum freedom to design their job often results in maximum ownership and accountability.)
- What will the end results look like?
- What communication tasks will they be responsible for? Will there be any tasks that others should be responsible for? (There shouldn't be, if at all possible.)
- What tools and resources will be helpful in executing the task?
- When should the task be complete? When should reporting take place?
- Who can they rely on for mentoring and support?
- Why is the task being completed? Why is it important?
- What other tasks or projects rely on this task? What's the big picture?

A Final Note

Input contributes significantly to accountability. Ideally, the person who is accountable for the project or task should design most of the goals and expectations. Input from those above the individual should be focused on the big picture, not the way the tasks will be carried out.

## Making Connections

**Look at your pre-assignment. What goals should have been set?**

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**What expectations should have been set?**

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## Top Ten Ways to Create and Share Ownership

1. Give employees the power to make decisions about how their job is done. When possible, give them say in the company's inner workings too.
2. Build rewards into the success of the company as well as individual departments. Make rewards based on results as well as actions.
3. Keep communication as open as possible. Share successes and failures.
4. Communication should be personal and intimate whenever possible – a meeting of 50 people with the CEO is far more effective than a newsletter or memo.
5. When you hand off a project, let go completely. Be supportive and offer advice and resources, but don't problem solve. One way to do this is to focus on the end results only, not the details.
6. Whenever possible, let people speak for themselves. If a report must be prepared or a presentation must be given, pass it off to the project owner.
7. Let employees know what the long-term plan is. Give them options for how they want to be involved through ventures like career and succession planning.
8. Encourage a holistic approach through the company. Focus on quality as well as quantity, customer satisfaction, and other emotion-based factors.
9. Invest in your employees. When possible, give them opportunities to learn and do new things. If possible, give them support to try new things – and don't say "I told you so" if it doesn't work.
10. Work on creating an atmosphere of cooperation and creativity rather than competition.

## Doing Delegation Right

### Understanding Delegation

#### Defining Delegation

**What do you think that delegation means?** Is it delegation to assign somebody the work that you don't want to do? Is it delegation to assign work to somebody when you are busy and then to reclaim it again when you have more time?

A common definition of delegation is entrusting power and authority to a person acting as your representative. While that may seem a little abstract, it really captures the meaning well. Another way to define delegation is getting your work done through other people.

It's more than simply assigning work. Delegation also involves making an investment in a person for the future and helping them to increase their own skills.

**In the broadest sense, delegation involves five things:**

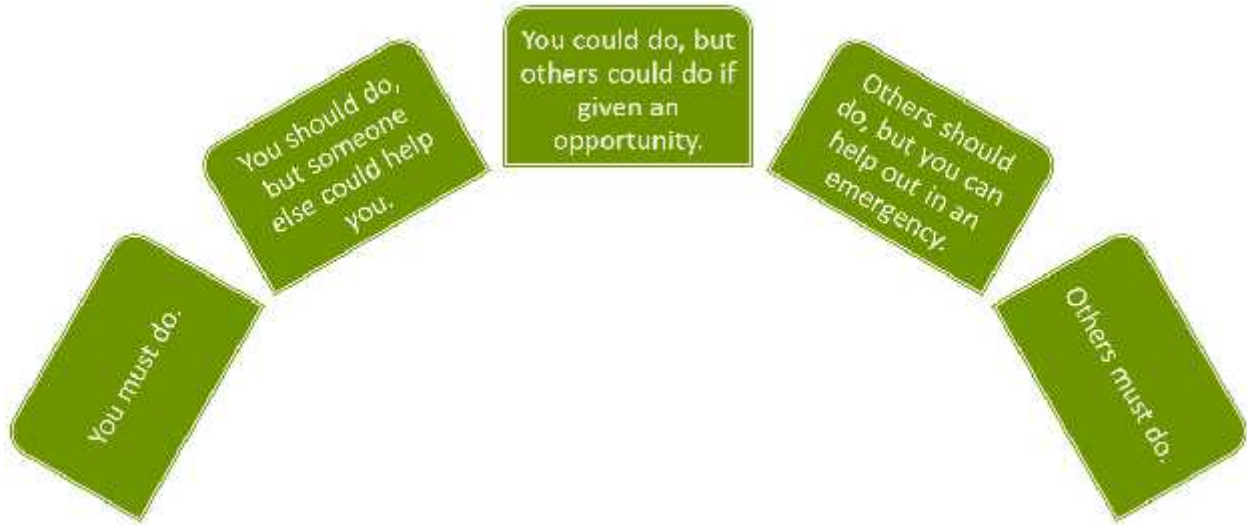
- The training and development of your staff
- The direction and follow-up of assignments
- The analysis of performance problems
- Coaching to overcome problems
- Periodic formal evaluations of performance

#### Four Basic Steps to Delegation



## Deciding What to Delegate

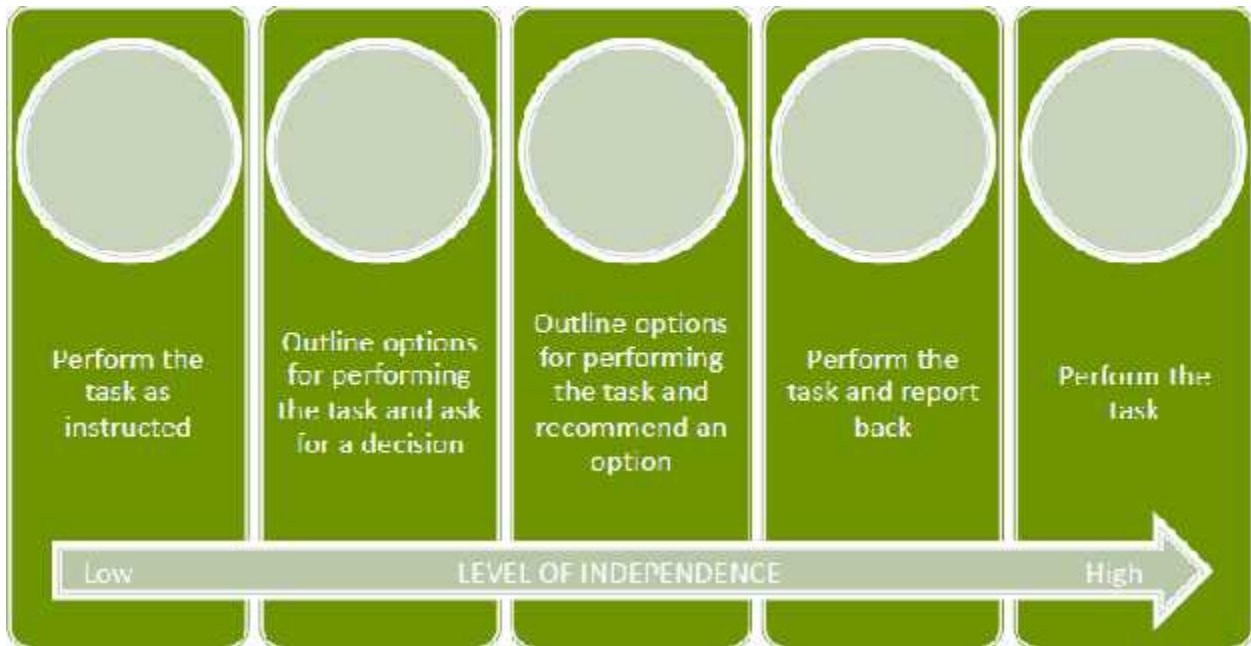
Part of preparing to delegate is deciding what tasks you can and cannot delegate. Tasks can generally be placed in one of five categories:



## The Five Levels

Delegation doesn't have to be all or nothing. In fact, you should consider what level of delegation is appropriate for the task, the employee, and the situation.

Here is an overview of the five levels of delegation:



## Breaking Down the Model

Let's say that we want an employee to prepare a summary report of their work over the past year that will be submitted to the executive team. How will each level of delegation look?

The **first level of delegation** is to have the employee perform the task exactly as instructed with no independence. In our example, we might give the employee a report template, the data, and similar reports. Then, we'll ask them to complete the report and submit it by a certain date.

The **second level of delegation** is to allow the employee to do some research (if necessary) and then give you options for the task. You make the decision and the employee completes the task according to your instructions. In our example, the employee might research different formats and give you some different options. They may also draft a list of items that they want to include in the report. Then, you will outline the format and contents for them. They will complete the report and submit it by a certain date.

The **third level of delegation** is similar to the second, except that an employee makes a recommendation. Continuing with our report example, the employee would recommend a format and possibly prepare an outline. You would approve it and ask the employee to complete and submit the report.

The **fourth level of delegation** is where independence really comes into play. This is the level that you will use most often once team members get up to speed. With our report example, you would simply ask the employee to complete the report and submit it by a certain date. (They may use existing procedures or templates, but the bulk of the decisions are up to them.) You would then review the report, approve it, and send it to the executive team.

The **fifth level of delegation** gives the employee complete freedom. With our report example, you would ask the employee to complete the report and submit it directly to the executive team. You may ask the employee to send you a copy of the report, but you would not have any active role in it.

## Monitoring Delegation

### The Importance of Monitoring

Your best efforts at delegating can fall short if progress isn't adequately monitored. It's also important to keep in mind that just because you have delegated tasks and given the individual the authority to get those tasks completed, you are ultimately responsible for the results of anything that you do delegate. You retain that responsibility as delegator.

Monitoring helps you catch problems as they arise and it helps motivate team members toward completing a task successfully. What do you consider when you are figuring out how much control or monitoring is necessary?

- The team member's experience and motivation
- Your working relationship
- Importance of task

### How Do You Monitor?

#### Assignment Log

Identify milestones in the project or task and then develop a system for tracking what tasks are assigned to whom and when they are to be completed.

#### Personal Follow-Up

Informal methods of follow-up are very effective. An assignment you ask about frequently is more important than one you mention once but never monitor. Your interest must be sincere to be effective. Although it may appear time consuming, the fact that you take the time to ask tells the team member that completion is important. Remember that although you have delegated something, you are still ultimately responsible for it.

#### Sampling Techniques

Depending on the type of work, you may ask for a sample of the work to monitor quality. For example, you might look at a portion of a report or sit in on a meeting the employee is chairing.

### Progress Reports

This is similar to an assignment log, except this time the onus is on the employee to include steps taken and difficulties in execution.

### Management by Exception

This is based on the idea that controls are only needed when there is a deviation from set standards. In this way you focus on unacceptable problems rather than try to monitor everything. However, don't use this method if difficulties are hard to spot, a single error could be significant, or the employee is inexperienced at the task.

## Offering Feedback

### The Ingredients of Good Feedback

One goal of feedback is for it to contribute to an improvement in future performance. Even when it does not lead to a desired level of performance, the meeting itself provides the platform to discuss expectations, results, motivation, and how to succeed. For employees (or even suppliers) who choose not to perform at an adequate level, the meeting serves as a benchmark within the larger performance management arena. If an employee refuses to comply, has been supported and coached to do well, and continues to refuse, then the supervisor has the necessary means to move into a disciplinary performance management plan.

When feedback is perceived to be negative (because of our own behavior, or perhaps because it is not well delivered), people will naturally try to avoid it, or at least minimize the negative effects. However, we need to let people know that it can be a great tool for personal development, especially when we include information on both the issues and the possible solutions. With this in mind, let's delve deeper into the six major characteristics of effective feedback.

#### In Private

Feedback should be given in private if your comments can be embarrassing, and a formal feedback meeting should always be held in private. While some people like the attention that comes from sincere praise or celebrating an accomplishment in front of others, some do not, and no one wants negativity shared in front of their peers. (This should be apparent without having to state it, but sometimes we get excited and forget!)

#### Balanced

Balance in this context is about designing the feedback session so that, even though there may be constructive criticism required, the employee does not feel attacked, or that all you have to say about his work is negative. We recommend that you avoid the older form of "sandwich approach" (by making a positive comment, a negative, and then a positive). However, you should still start any feedback with a positive comment about some aspect of the employee's work. If you are not comfortable with this, or not good at small talk, write some comments down ahead of time to keep yourself focused. Your employee will appreciate that you get to the heart of the meeting quickly instead of letting any anxiety build. Feedback that is delivered in specific terms and in a sincere manner is usually accepted well, even when we are receiving criticism.

### Relevant

Keep the conversation focused on feedback that is relevant and job related, and to things which the employee has control over. For example, complaining about the way a letter looks when the employee only has access to an ancient printer that adds lines to everything, or asking for a sophisticated looking brochure when there is no budget provided for the proper paper and licensed photography, only adds to the employee's stress and frustration.

### Specific

Avoid general statements when you deliver feedback. "You seem unmotivated," is not nearly as helpful as, "You arrived late to work at least three days a week, your last two assignments were late, and you did not attend the new employee lunch last week."

### Documented

Base your comments on documentation, facts, and your own observation. Don't rely on what another manager or a colleague told you, or what someone overheard, when you should be available to monitor what is going on yourself.

### Personal (In the Right Way)

Compliments or criticisms that are directed generally toward the team are meaningless to an employee. "We just don't seem able to get out error-free invoices," is not as constructive as, "Three of the last invoices you sent out had errors in them." Describe the behavior that is unsatisfactory, rather than judge a person because of it. Base it on their actions, and don't make a personal attack on the individual.

## A Toolbox for Managers

### Identifying Learning Opportunities

As you can see, there are a lot of skills required to help you become more accountable. Accountability truly is a state of mind, and it will require constant work on your part. But trust us – it's worth it!

We have talked about a lot of skills today that will help you become more accountable. Here is a summary of the most important items.

**Coaching**

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**Teamwork**

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**Delegation**

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**Leadership**

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**Time Management/Personal Productivity**

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**Communication**

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**Goal Setting**

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**Giving and Receiving Feedback**

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**Public Speaking and Presentation**

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**Planning**

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**Project Management**

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**Relationship Building**

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**Negotiation**

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**Assertiveness**

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**Further Reading:**

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