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The 4th Function of a Team: Accepting Accountability

- Marcia Hughes, President, Collaborative Growth

Life is a promise; fulfill it - Mother Theresa

Imagine these two scenarios:

A. You are walking out of your weekly team meeting charged up and focused. The team walked through current and long term responsibilities and you know what is expected of you. You also know they're going to hold your feet to the fire. Everyone expects results.

B. You are walking out of your weekly team meeting feeling blah, wondering about what movie you'll see tomorrow night and decide to get some coffee before you return to your desk.

Which scenario sounds more like your work life? Which would you prefer? Why?

You are likely to do more work under scenario A, at least more work that brings about positive results. You'll know others are relying on you, and you should be able to rely on them as well. Scenario A is a winner. It's the ticket to self respect, individual and team motivation and organizational results. Scenario B is a disheartening. It's a drag on your success and that of your organization.

5 Functions or Dysfunctions?

This is our fourth article in our series exploring Patrick Lencioni's book, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. As you may recall, his dysfunctions are: absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and inattention to results. Because I believe so strongly in the power of optimism, I'm discussing these skills in terms of their functional application. If you have been helping your team expand its skills so the first three are in place, that is they are expanding their trust of one another, learning to take advantage of the gifts conflict brings, and making a commitment, then you have a group ripe for accepting accountability. Each member takes personal responsibility. How does that happen? Begin with the strength offered by Helen Keller's insight.

I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble. - Helen Keller



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The Six Steps to Accountability:

We foster accountability in a team by creating the right conditions:

- Start with the right attitude.
- Clarify - the goals, processes and expectations.
- Expect positive results.
- Delegate - share responsibility, power, data and success.
- Facilitate creativity and innovation.
- Reward consistently and frequently.

Powerful teams resonate with an interesting mix of great expectations for success, and humility in knowing that it's as Helen Keller reminds us, doing a good job with each individual task that adds up to the cutting edge difference.

Your Team's Action

To create a flourishing atmosphere of accountability in a team, you must hold one another to clarity. Hold one another to being clear about what is expected and when and by whom. Clarify the agreement and verbally commit to the task and timing. Then hold each other to those agreements. Be challenging if the agreements aren't met by respectfully noticing the non-results and discussing what will be needed given the missing pieces.

We often avoid accountability because we are afraid, embarrassed for ourselves or one another, and feel guilty. None of these negative feelings will inspire you or your team members to be proactive. Being willing to challenge and then move on to the next necessary step can create an atmosphere of accountability without fear. You will be more honest with yourself and one another and that feels good and creates great results!

Active accountability requires joining the meaning of work with action. As Goethe challenges us:

Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do. - Johann von Goethe