

MASTERING MANAGEMENT

with **Mark Taylor**



Hold People Accountable

The single biggest obstacle to success is the absence of execution. This was the essence of the book, *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done* (Bossidy & Charan, 2002). A few months ago, I wrote that one of the most frequent complaints I hear in my work with leaders of organizations is the following: "I am sick and tired of my people not following through." In that column, I spoke about the need for managers to make clear requests, but when you've done that and the task was not completed, what do you do? Should you let it go, or confront them? If you hold your people 100% accountable for fulfilling their commitments, you will develop a top-notch operation. It isn't easy, and it takes a lot of discipline; this column will provide you with some guidelines.

What is the cost to you and your organization when commitments are not fulfilled? In these economic times, our job requires us to satisfy customers, provide quality service and do it faster and cheaper than the competition. When someone on our team misses a deadline or performs poor work, it can cost us customers, rework, expedited shipping and poor morale. As a manager, it can mean a loss of trust and respect amongst the rest of the team. The rest of the staff may end up picking up the slack and becoming resentful. Stress rises.

So how do you create a culture of accountability? One of the methods that I have seen that has been successful is to have a meeting with your team to discuss this very issue. Have a frank conversation about the costs and your vision. The objective of holding people accountable is to fulfill the mission of the company, give great service, outperform the competition and provide a work environment of respect and trust. A team that works together to determine the consequences of non-performance benefits the entire organization.

First, you must create time-specific, measurable goals and provide the tools and resources for your employees to succeed. Second, you need to track and measure the results. Finally, you need to confront the individual when the results are not done on time or according to the standards that you have specified.

How you confront someone requires skill and courage. Do not do it when you are angry; you don't want to accuse the person, and you want to have all the facts. Have a straight conversation. Check and make sure that the commitment was clear and verify that they failed to perform. Find out what happened; you

The Heat Is Turning Up

- ▶ **Check** your intention; you want to investigate before accusing.
- ▶ **Frame appropriately**; you have a vision of a team that keeps their word.
- ▶ **Verify** the previous commitment.
- ▶ **Verify** the failure to honor the commitment.
- ▶ **Inquire** into what happened.
- ▶ **Evaluate** the damage and express your complaint.
- ▶ **Re-negotiate** recommitment.
- ▶ **Learn** and prepare for the future.

will probably hear a story or an excuse. Listen to the story. If there is not a legitimate reason for the task not being fulfilled, you should talk to them about the consequences. If the team has defined consequences from your previous meeting, it becomes much easier. You want to be clear about how this affects their relationship with you and your ability to trust them in the future. Reinforce your vision of a team that can count on one another to provide quality service. And if it continues to happen, you will need to find someone else that will perform.

Creating a culture of accountability will make your life easier and your operation successful. Great teams don't tolerate mediocrity; great leaders hold their people accountable. ■

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