

Holding Employees Accountable

Accountability is a key factor in ensuring that employees meet expectations, contribute to organizational goals, and perform to the best of their abilities. However, holding employees accountable isn't just about enforcing consequences for poor performance, it's about creating a culture of responsibility, trust, and growth. Let's explore what a good manager does to hold their employees accountable and what benefits are reaped for doing so.

1. Set Clear Expectations and Goals

In order to hold an employee accountable, there need to be set expectations for you to hold them to. These expectations should be clearly defined and clearly communicated to the employee. Expectations may revolve around behavior, performance, and results. Ambiguous or vague instructions can lead to confusion, frustration, and missed targets/deadlines.

When setting goals, SMART Goals can be an effective method. SMART goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.

Research by Locke and Latham (2002) on goal-setting theory shows that specific and challenging goals lead to higher performance compared to vague goals. When goals are clear, employees can self-monitor and gauge their progress, making it easier for managers to hold them accountable.

2. Provide Regular Feedback and Check-Ins

Regular feedback is a cornerstone of effective accountability. Feedback should not be reserved solely for performance reviews; instead, it should be an ongoing process. Feedback is most effective when given in a timely manner. Feedback should both praise an employee for positive actions and criticize an employee for negative actions, with suggestions for how to do things better in the future.

A study by the Corporate Leadership Council (2004) found that employees who received frequent feedback were more engaged and performed better than those who received little to no feedback. By making feedback a regular practice, managers not only hold employees accountable but also support their development.

3. Be Consistent and Fair

Consistency and fairness are crucial in holding employees accountable. If employees see that accountability is applied inconsistently, or if some employees are held to different standards than others, it can create resentment and reduce morale. Managers must apply policies, procedures, and expectations in a uniform manner to ensure that all employees are held to the same standards.

4. Address Poor Performance Quickly

When an employee's performance starts to slip, it's important for managers to address the issue as soon as possible. Delaying difficult conversations can lead to bigger problems down the line, including decreased team morale and disengagement. Addressing performance issues promptly helps prevent small problems from becoming large, unmanageable ones.

Managers should approach these conversations with empathy, focusing on the employee's behavior or outcomes. The goal should be to understand the root cause of the performance issue and work together to find a solution. Addressing poor performance doesn't necessarily have to result in discipline right away. You can give critical feedback and observe if it changes the behavior. If it doesn't, it may be time to use formal discipline and document your observations and corrective actions.

A study by Gallup (2017) emphasized that employees who had managers who actively engaged with them during performance issues were more likely to improve their performance and remain with the company.

5. Recognize and Reward Accountability

Accountability doesn't just involve corrective action—it also includes recognizing and rewarding employees who consistently meet or exceed expectations. Acknowledging employees' accountability through rewards or public recognition reinforces positive behavior and motivates others to take responsibility for their own work.

The Benefits of Holding Employees Accountable

When managers effectively hold employees accountable, there are several key benefits for employees, supervisors, and the organization as a whole.

- improved performance
- more employee participation and involvement
- increased feelings of competency
- increased employee engagement
- more creativity and innovation
- higher employee morale and satisfaction with the work

Conclusion

Holding employees accountable is not just about enforcing rules—it's about creating an environment where employees feel responsible for their performance and are given the tools and support they need to succeed. Clear expectations, regular feedback, fairness, and recognition all contribute to an accountable workforce. When done right, accountability not only boosts individual and team performance but also promotes a culture of trust, collaboration, and continuous growth.

References

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