

The Accountability Revolution continues!
Mark Samuel's monthly guide to accountability-based results
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Interlocking Accountability: The Secret to a Winning Team

Greetings, clients!

You may have noticed that I love sports analogies. Get ready for another one! This month I'd like to discuss what teamwork *really* means—and how it applies to the workplace.

Picture what would happen if a quarterback hurled the football with no regard to whether the wide receiver could catch it. Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? After all, football is a game in which every team member wins or loses—together. Shouldn't the same be true of the business world? Though we embrace "teamwork" rhetoric, most companies continue to operate as a group of separate individuals with separate goals.

True teamwork requires what I call **interlocking accountability**. Traditional business structure is a vertical hierarchy: I report to a boss who reports to a boss who reports to a boss and so on. To move beyond that mindset, we must become accountable to each other laterally as well as vertically. That way, a success for you is a success for me. We unify, share resources and strive for the same goals—and we all win.

Here are some tips for companies wishing to move toward interlocking accountability:

1. Support, don't blame!

In sports, successful teams stick together. All members accept the win or the loss and they all take responsibility for each other's performance. They support each other rather than pointing the finger when something goes wrong and instigating a blame war. Adopt this policy at your company. Instead of blaming your coworker when she drops the ball, say "we're here to help you; now what can we do differently?"

2. Create a blueprint of success.

Before you can talk about holding people accountable, there must be a standard to hold them accountable to. Your team should establish specific expectations up front and make them clear to everyone involved. It's not enough to talk about a vision. Contractors never build a house based on a vision! They begin with a blueprint that identifies the foundation, the walls, the roof—all the way down to the size of the nails. The same should be true for any business project. Create your blueprint up front and your "house" will be strong in the end.

3. Expect some fallout.

Interlocking accountability usually translates to hard work. And it often means letting go of projects a team member may have his or her ego wrapped up in. For both reasons, holding people accountable will often expose—and even *break*—a team’s “weak links.” I always tell my clients that some team members may quit. If someone has been coasting along in his job and failing to live up to his promises, then turning the accountability spotlight on that person forces him support his team members in kind . . . or leave.

It’s amazing what can happen when coworkers support each other. I have seen struggling companies adopt interlocking accountability practices and completely turn themselves around. So the next time you’re tempted to say, “I threw the ball, see what a great player I am!” try saying “How can I help you catch?” Your team—that is, your company—will be on its way to victory.

Mark Samuel, President
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