

It's a well-established fact that accountability greatly increases the likelihood of success. Yet most of us cringe at the idea of being held accountable. Why is it so hard to set aside our egos and welcome something that we know would help us succeed?

Rather than dive deep into the psychology of our resistance, I want to propose just one idea that might lower the barrier to accountability we find in our followers.

If you're like me, when I think of accountability I picture someone pointing out where I'm failing. And it's true, part of what makes accountability work is our aversion to having an uncomfortable conversation if we fail. But what would happen if we knew our accountability session would emphasize our successes without letting us off the hook for the misses?



At this point, I picture many readers saying, "Of course, I always acknowledge their success as well." And I know some leaders do this well. But I also know that most of us don't do it as well as we think we do. A quick nod to the successes before focusing on the failures isn't much help. Consider the following as you work meaningful affirmation into your accountability sessions:

- Do you engage with them around their successes like you do with their failures, or do you just spout a few "good job" comments and move on to what you want to fix? Do you ask them what they learned through this success? What energized them about it? What other opportunities do they hope this success will lead to? *Let them talk about their successes, not just defend their failures.*
- If you struggle to find any positives, the problem is more likely you than them. Are you tuned to see potential (leading) or just to fix problems (managing)? You may think you have a bunch of "C"-grade players, but it is more likely they have a "C" leader. Your job is to motivate and inspire them to their best potential. *If they're not doing anything praiseworthy, that's evidence you're not leading them well.*
- Forget the shallow "sandwich" approach of surrounding a negative with positives. Not that the sequence is bad, but they'll see through your games if you don't sincerely mean what you say. *Your sincerity matters more than the sequence.*
- Hopefully you're creating a culture where affirmation is frequent and immediate – not just reserved for scheduled sessions. A continuously safe, affirming environment makes everyone want to succeed so you'll need fewer conversations around things that don't get done.

I'm not suggesting focusing on positives and ignoring negatives. They need to expect the uncomfortable conversations about what didn't happen. But they should also know – and not by osmosis – that we're more interested in their successes than their failures.

This shift won't make everyone jump at the chance to be held accountable. But associating "accountability" as much with the "carrot" as with the "stick" might lower the resistance a little and improve results a lot.