



Workplace Satisfaction Project Accountability Tools

Accountability is about holding oneself and others responsible for meeting established standards. It should be practiced regularly and informally by supervisors and non-supervisors alike. The most critical accountability relationship is between a supervisor and an employee who demonstrates poor performance or conduct. The NPS, along with many other organizations, has historically done a poor job of holding such employees accountable, often as a result of insufficient conflict management skills and/or fear of offense. Failing to hold underperforming employees accountable creates a major workplace effectiveness problem and has a significant negative morale impact on high-performing employees.

- Managers must create, and effectively communicate, very clear standards and expectations for their workplace. Without these in place, there can be little real accountability.
- Once established and communicated, managers must enforce standards and expectations. This must be done fairly, thoughtfully, consistently, and proactively.
- Managers skilled in accountability management will provide structures and processes which will help people do what they say they'll do. This makes it easier for everyone to be responsible.
- *Every* employee can promote accountability by first taking responsibility for their own actions, and then having the courage to speak up when others fail to meet established standards. Discussing poor performance and/or conduct directly with a failing employee or their supervisor is challenging and uncomfortable – but tremendously necessary, for the sake of the team.
- Employee performance plans must be clear, thoughtful, and specific. There is no value in a performance plan that is nonspecific and generalized, as it makes the performance standard unclear and weak, and therefore unenforceable when performance problems arise.
- It is useful to align performance plans to the NPS Mission; anchoring the employee's work to a clear sense of purpose promotes employee self-accountability.
- Taking shortcuts on law, policy, or procedure due to time constraints is a major red flag of accountability, as it involves intentionally falling short of established standards. Such practices are unacceptable and unprofessional – and sometimes illegal.
- All NPS supervisors have clear and powerful performance management tools at their disposal in the form of the Performance Management System; they must be knowledgeable about them and have the integrity and courage to use them. These include employee counseling, opportunity periods, and probationary periods, among many others. A full listing of these tools may be found in the department's Performance Management Handbook (DM 370).
- All employees should promote a culture of inviting, appreciating, and incorporating feedback regarding their work and their conduct.
- Managers may choose to implement formal or informal 'bottom-up' evaluations, in which employees are afforded a 'safe' opportunity to provide feedback about their supervisors. Such evaluations will not work and should not be undertaken unless employees feel confident that there will be no reprisal for their statements. An atmosphere of trust is key.
- All employees should promote a culture of following through on promises made. Lack of accountability for acting on promises has a major, lasting negative impact on morale.

- Supervisors should not reduce the workload of a poor performer simply to avoid the performance management process. The performance management system depends on poor performers either being trained to meet the standard, or being removed.
- It is easier for a supervisor to overlook the performance standards and allow poor performers to 'skate', but it is not acceptable. Accountability takes time, courage, and commitment.
- All employees should promote a culture of willingness to acknowledge mistakes and work on their own shortcomings. If managers do not demonstrate this virtue, employees must make their voices heard in a constructive manner.
- Problems of performance are often about insufficient knowledge or lack of clear expectations. Supervisors must invest the time necessary to correct either or both condition. There are no effective shortcuts.
- Problems of conduct may be about lack of clear expectations but may also be something that a supervisor has little control over besides discipline. Supervisors must invest the time necessary to correct the conduct or remove the employee. There are no effective shortcuts.
- Supervisors must be aware that increasing the workload on an employee may cause a drop in performance. To address this, the supervisor must either train the employee to manage the new workload, or recognize that they have overloaded a previously-successful employee. In either case, it is the supervisor's responsibility to ensure that the employee does not have an unmanageable workload, and it is the employee's obligation to speak up when they feel overloaded.
- Supervisors must record underperformance or misconduct thoroughly, quickly, and proactively. Establishing a pattern of behavior is critical in diagnosing the problem and working toward a solution.
- Investing time with employees to regularly check in may help identify/prevent small performance or conduct problems before they grow into much larger and more time-intensive problems.
- Managers should conduct regular progress checks and provide progress updates to ensure accountability for deliverables.
- Often, an accountability problem is a 'coaching' problem in disguise. Employees who feel less valued are less likely to be self-motivated to deliver, while employees who feel highly valued rarely fail to meet expectations. Emotional intelligence by supervisors is key.
- When setting standards, remember that they should be SMART:
 - o Specific
 - o Measurable
 - o Attainable
 - o Reasonable
 - o Time-sensitive