

LEADERS MUST BUILD ACCOUNTABILITY

BUILDING TEAMS THAT SHOW UP

ONE of the most frustrating realities of leadership is discovering that not everyone performs with the same level of commitment. Most teams have individuals who consistently step forward, while others seem to disappear whenever the pressure rises.

Deadlines approach, challenges emerge, and suddenly the reliable few end up carrying everyone else. It is an uncomfortable situation, but one every leader must be prepared to address.

Leadership is not about hoping people will do the right thing. It is about creating an environment where accountability is expected, recognised and upheld. Ignoring poor commitment rarely makes it disappear. In fact, it usually encourages it.

The first responsibility of a leader is to distinguish between someone who is unwilling and someone who is unable. A team member may appear absent because they lack confidence, are overwhelmed, or are dealing with personal difficulties.

Another may simply have chosen not to engage. These situations require different responses. Compassion should never replace accountability, but accountability should never exclude compassion.

Clear expectations prevent many future problems. People should understand exactly what is expected of them, what success looks like, and what responsibilities they carry.



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Ambiguity gives people room to justify poor performance. Clarity removes excuses.

Leaders must also avoid making assumptions. Before drawing conclusions, have honest conversations.

Ask questions rather than make accusations. Sometimes what appears to be laziness is actually confusion, poor communication or a lack of resources. Understanding the cause allows the leader to respond appropriately rather than emotionally.

However, repeated patterns cannot be ignored. When someone consistently disappears during critical moments, the issue is no longer about circumstances.

It becomes a matter of commitment and reliability. Every team depends upon trust, and trust quickly erodes when people cannot rely on one another.

Nothing damages morale faster than allowing dependable people to carry the workload while others contribute very little. High performers notice everything. They notice who stays late, who

volunteers, who delivers, and who quietly disappears when work becomes difficult. If leaders tolerate this imbalance, they unintentionally punish commitment while rewarding complacency.

Many leaders make the mistake of protecting harmony at the expense of standards. Difficult conversations are postponed because confrontation feels uncomfortable. Yet avoiding conflict rarely preserves harmony. It simply transfers frustration to those who continue doing the work.

Addressing poor commitment does not require aggression. It requires honesty. Calm, respectful conversations often have greater impact than emotional criticism. Describe the behaviour, explain its consequences on the wider team, and make expectations unmistakably clear moving forward.

Consistency is equally important. Rules that apply only to some people quickly lose credibility. When leaders excuse one person's behaviour while holding others accountable, they create resentment. Fairness is not treating everyone identically; it is applying standards consistently and transparently.

Leaders should also recognise and celebrate those who consistently step up.

Too often attention focuses only on those causing problems, while dependable team members quietly continue delivering results without acknowledgement. Recognition reinforces the behaviours that strengthen teams.

At the same time, leaders must resist the temptation to rely exclusively on their strongest performers. The dependable few are often asked to solve every crisis because they can be trusted. Over time, this creates exhaustion and resentment. Reliable people are not an unlimited resource. Even the most committed individuals eventually become tired if they feel others are being carried indefinitely.

Building resilience means developing everyone, not just relying on the best. Leaders should coach, mentor and create opportunities for growth before a crisis arrives.

Teams perform better when responsibility is shared rather than concentrated among a handful of individuals.

Culture also plays a decisive role. Teams quickly learn what behaviours are accepted. If disappearing during difficult periods carries no consequences, others may eventually follow the same example. Conversely, when commitment, ownership and reliability are consistently valued, these behaviours become part of the team's identity.

Leaders themselves must model the standards they expect. Nothing undermines credibility faster than asking others to make sacrifices that the leader is unwilling to make. During demanding periods, people watch their leaders closely. Presence matters. Visibility matters. Commitment from the top inspires commitment throughout the team.

Not every person will respond

positively to feedback. Some will improve, while others will continue repeating the same behaviour despite support, coaching and clear expectations. Leaders must accept that not everyone belongs in every team.

Protecting the culture sometimes requires making difficult decisions about those who consistently undermine it.

This is not about perfection. Every individual will have moments of struggle, make mistakes or require support. Strong teams allow room for humanity. What they cannot tolerate is repeated indifference disguised as temporary difficulty.

Ultimately, leadership is about protecting people and purpose.

That means supporting those who genuinely need help while challenging those who repeatedly avoid responsibility. It means recognising effort, confronting complacency and ensuring that reliability becomes the norm rather than the exception.

The strongest teams are not built because everyone is equally talented.

They are built because everyone understands that when the critical moment arrives, every person shows up, contributes fully and can be counted upon. That is the culture great leaders create, protect and never compromise.

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