

Jeff Oltmann on Mastering Projects
Building Accountability

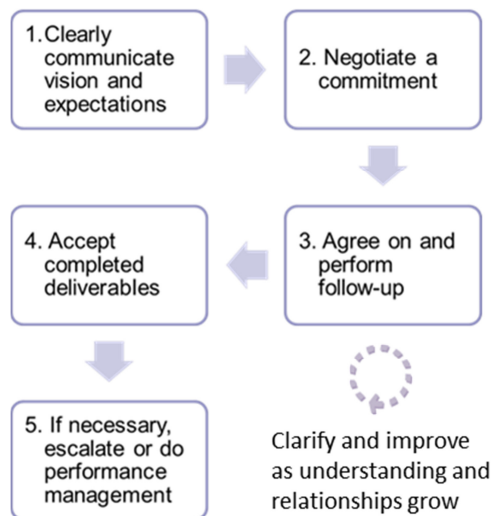
Lack of Accountability

Often leaders ask me how to improve accountability within their project-based organization. However, that same leader may be contributing to the accountability problem without realizing it, often because he communicates his expectations poorly or not at all.

I believe that accountability starts with clear communication. You can't hold someone accountable unless they first understand what you expect from them and why you think it is important.

Steps to Improvement

- 1** Therefore the first step is clearly communicating your vision and expectations.



- 2** Follow that by *explicitly* negotiating a commitment. Don't expect the other person to read your mind or guess at what you want. There should be discussion and agreement at this point. You're aiming to get the other

person to buy in and take ownership. Otherwise, the best you will get is compliance instead of top performance. Often you won't even get compliance.

- 3** The negotiated commitment should include agreement on what follow-up and check-ins will occur while the work is being done. Then both parties should make sure they carry out that follow-up. You may want to add some reminders to your calendar or action item list to help with this.

- 4** When the agreed upon work is done, clearly communicate whether it is satisfactory to you. If so, explicitly agree that the commitment has been fulfilled. If not, explain why and renegotiate the commitment. If you've been doing good follow-up during the work period, there will rarely be surprises at this stage. Remember to acknowledge and spotlight good performance.

- 5** If you can't come to an agreement, escalate (or begin performance management if the other person works for you.)

If you do these steps consistently, you will set a standard of performance and accountability that others will emulate and spread throughout the organization.

About the Author

Jeff Oltmann is principal consultant at Synergy Professional Services, LLC in Portland, Oregon (www.spspro.com). He is also on the graduate faculty of the Division of Management at Oregon Health and Science University. Jeff welcomes your questions and ideas. You can contact him at jeff@spspro.com or read previous articles at www.spspro.com/resources.htm