



## How to Turn Accountability into a Core Sales Strategy



Sixteen years ago, I sat in my office, door closed, stomach in knots. It wasn't even 9:30 in the morning and I'd just fired my top three sales reps, one by one, as they came in for the day.

**T**hey were completely unprepared for what was about to happen, and I watched the fear and disbelief creep over each of their faces as I ushered them into the conference room and broke the news that this would be their last day with the company.

After it was done, I retreated to my office with one burning question, “How the hell did we get to this point?” How had we become hostages to three women and the revenue they produced? Over the years I've unpacked that question and have come to a deep understanding of the answer.

I had failed to create a culture of accountability.

Because I never want to repeat that experience, I've spent the last 16 years learning how to prevent it. And because I don't want you to ever have that experience either, I'm going to share what I've learned.

A culture of accountability isn't just a “nice to have”. It's a fundamental sales strategy for any successful sales leader. It helps you attract and retain top talent, achieve plan, and create trust among your team members, prospects, and clients. In short, it makes you look like a hero. Consequently, it deserves the same time, attention, discussion, and

thoughtful planning as your new 2021 go-to-market strategy.

### How do you build a culture of accountability?

Culture always starts at the top. If you can't walk the talk then you've already failed at the game. What do you need to be accountable for? Here's a high-level list:

- Hiring for success
- Communicating expectations clearly and with transparency
- Establishing all of the consequences for unmet expectations and enforcing them
- Providing quality onboarding experiences
- Providing ongoing training, coaching, and mentoring

Demanding accountability from others requires that you demonstrate accountability in your leadership. Take a hard look in the mirror and ask yourself if you've earned the right to hold others accountable.

Since you're still reading, I'll assume you said yes.

In that case, here is my 8-Step Action Plan for

creating an accountability culture in your organization.

### 1. Hire for Accountability

I use behavioral-based interview questions to determine which candidates are willing to be held accountable and which will blame their territory, SDR, or the economy for missing quota. Here's one of my go-to questions, "Tell me about the last time you missed quota and what were the circumstances surrounding that?"

### 2. Communicate Expectations Early

Begin setting expectations even during the interview process. Candidates need to make educated choices about the position which means they must understand that they will be held to non-negotiable expectations. If being held accountable will be an issue for them it is best that they use that information to self-select out of the interview process before an offer is made.

### 3. Determine Expectations

You should have standard expectations for your team. Some I recommend are being at above 80% quota, self-sourcing 20-30 percent of their pipeline, a set work schedule and availability, CRM hygiene and pipeline discipline, industry expertise, process for sharing information, and ethics and integrity.

Once you determine standard expectations, you can decide if specific reps need additional expectations set, based on past situations.

### 4. Make Accountability a 2-Way Street

Share what your team can expect from you. For example, your leadership style, your communication preferences, frequency of feedback and coaching, your non-negotiables, and standard consequences of failing to meet expectations.

### 5. Get on the Same Page and Put EVERYTHING in Writing

Sit down with each rep and outline what is expected of them and why you believe those expectations will help

them succeed. Check for buy-in and negotiate any expectations you feel they are hedging on. Once you're on the same page, put it all in writing.

### 6. Outline How You'll Know if They are Being Accountable

How will you monitor expectations? Will this be done during 1:1 meetings? Will you be reviewing the CRM, call recordings, or participating in prospecting calls? Make this clear.

### 7. Establish Consequences BEFORE Things go South

Having an accountability culture means not only laying out expectations, but also communicating consequences. You may have "rules", i.e., falling below 80% of quota will put you on PIP, but also ask your reps this question, "What would you like me to do if you fail to meet any expectation we've agreed to?" A self-aware rep is likely to give you a better strategy for motivating them than you might come up with on your own."

### 8. Hold Quarterly Expectation Meetings

It might be tempting to set goals on January 1 and assume that there will be no need to tweak or pivot. But you don't have that luxury. Expectations need to be evaluated and adjusted regularly.

Creating a culture of accountability could be your most meaningful sales strategy for 2021. And you can do it if you have the desire to set your team up for success, are willing to communicate honestly, and have the discipline to commit to these tactics. The best part is that the return is exponential -- the more deeply you incorporate accountability into your culture the greater the dividends become. ■

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