

## Managing Accountability

By Bridget Montana, APRN, MS, FPCN, MBA

What is a manager's greatest hurdle to achieving success, especially in this new era of massive collaboration?

When I posed this question to the managers and leaders in the NCHPP Clinical and Operations Management Section, their overwhelming response was "accountability"—that managing accountability was the major barrier to achieving their goals.

Much has been written on this topic over the years—on the difficulty of holding staff accountable and the ramifications of the failure to do so. In a survey of 400 business leaders conducted by [OnePoint Consulting](#), 40 percent reported that the employees in their organizations are not held accountable for results.

Interestingly, many managers often look to someone else to take responsibility for being accountable, rather than taking the necessary steps to be more accountable themselves.

According to authors Chris McChesney, Sean Covey and Jim Huling in their book, *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*, there are two principle areas a leader can influence when it comes to producing results: (1) the strategy or plan, and (2) the ability to execute the strategy. They also noted that most leaders reported "the ability to execute the strategy" to be the most challenging because their academic preparation was focused on strategy and not execution.

It has also been my experience that managers lack the skills or "know how" to manage employee accountability. Executing a strategy requires action and behavioral changes to attain specific results. Telling an employee to do something is usually inadequate because, oftentimes, the employee doesn't understand what is expected or know how to proceed. I determined that a process was necessary for managers to follow as a recipe for successful execution.

In my work, I have found the following four rules recommended by McChesney, Covey and Huling to be quite valuable as that recipe for successful execution. These rules when followed have created success. But in this case, the rules are not meant to be broken. When they are applied consistently and accurately, managers can obtain profound results.

### 1. Focus on the Wildly Important Goals

Traditionally, leaders thought the more goals they had, the better the chance for a successful organization. In reality, however, the more one tries to do, the less that is accomplished.

Following this rule allows you to have a laser-focus on a very important goal that is going to move the organization forward. It will help you move from a loosely defined and difficult-to-communicate list of objectives to a small, focused set of achievable targets.

## **2. Act on Lead Measures**

First, let's define "measures." In this context, the authors define two types: lag measures and lead measures.

Lag measures are the tracking measurements of the wildly important goals. By the time you receive the results, the performance that drove the results is in the past; you cannot change or influence them. Lead measures are different in that they measure the new behaviors that will drive success on the lag measures. The behaviors can be simple or complex, but are usually predictive and can be influenced by the team members. For example, a patient who has lost 10 pounds is a lag measure; giving the patient high-calorie supplemental drinks and pureed food on a daily basis to assist him with swallowing is a lead measure.

This rule calls for identifying those steps (or lead measures) that will have the most impact on helping you achieve your goals—and focusing only on them.

## **3. Keep a Compelling Scoreboard**

People play differently when they are keeping score. Teams keep score on themselves. This improves personal accountability and improves engagement. Performance improves when there is an emotional connection to the work. It is important to let the team devise and oversee the scoreboard. Keep it simple and clear to determine if the team is winning or losing.

## **4. Create a Cadence of Accountability**

This rule calls for holding regular, frequent and brief meetings with the team that owns these wildly important goals. At each meeting, each member of the team must answer the question: "What are the one or two most important things I can do next week (outside the whirlwind) that will have the biggest impact on the scoreboard?"

Following this rule creates a regular, "just in time" execution plan that adapts to unforeseen challenges and opportunities. When the team sees the lag measure of a big goal move as a result of their effort, they will know they are winning. This impacts morale and engagement.

This is obviously where the execution also happens. Following the first three rules sets up the game, while this fourth rule puts you in the game. It is where accountability lives.

## **In Summary**

I have found the power of this system comes from following *all four* rules. And, while they may seem fairly simple, they are not that easy to do *consistently*. It requires sustained commitment and a culture of cadence to penetrate an organization.

Recently there has been a significant amount of chatter from hospice leaders who are struggling with maintaining the culture of their organizations through this period of inflection in the healthcare industry. This four-step process is a great tool to use as it will provide a laser-sharp focus on the organizational goals and resources necessary to achieve success. Moreover, it will provide a method to ensure that the organizational culture is maintained as it unites team members with a clearer vision and instills a passion for success. Employee engagement is maximized.

To ensure success, sufficient time and resources need to be dedicated to educating managers and staff. Remember too that these are not guidelines, but a set of disciplines which, once anchored in the organization, will return high dividends. Leaders and managers will no longer say accountability is a challenge to their success. Rather, the cadence of accountability creates the natural recurring cycle of planning and execution which, in turn, gets things done as promised.

*Bridget Montana is the NCHPP Clinical and Operations Management Section leader, and a former recipient of the Heart of Hospice Award.*

**References:**

Covey, S; McChesney, C; Huling, J. (2012) *The 4 Disciplines of Execution: Achieving Your Wildly Important Goals*. New York: Simon and Schuster.