



# ACCOUNTABILITY: An “I” Experience

## 5 Ways Teams Can Build Strong Accountability

By Deborah Mackin

Let's say you've recently launched a cross-functional team to work on building customer retention or improve communication throughout the organization. Or, maybe your team is a project team or working group that has to develop a new product or approach that will have profound affect on how quickly a product gets to market. Ten or twelve people have agreed to serve on the team, many excited to be making an important contribution. The team is aware of its mission and the goals have been outlined during the first team meeting. Heads are nodding, and you think everyone understands and the team is off to a good start. However, several months later the team is still talking about what it will do and nothing is getting done. There has to be a better way to build clear accountability in a team so that results are produced quickly. Let's outline some strategies, as suggested in the *Team Building Tool Kit, Second Edition* (AMACOM, Fall 2007) to help build accountability from the team's first meeting.

- 1. Set SMART Goals:** Most goals are written as activities (e.g. Develop a plan for a new product launch) rather than written for results (e.g. Deliver a comprehensive 9-month product launch plan by December, 2007). Team goals must be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-Oriented and Time Bound. The goals are written in the team's charter and demonstrate a bias for action from the very beginning.
- 2. Construct the Work Breakdown Plan:** Attached to the team charter is the Work Breakdown Plan that identifies the milestones, or what we call “buckets of work” the team must tackle to achieve the goals, including the start and end date of each bucket. Without the work breakdown plan, many teams don't know where to begin. The team takes each milestone and determines the activities or tasks that will need to get done. These are assigned to members or sub-teams with deadline dates that fall within the milestone delivery dates. Champions are identified for each milestone and for the overall goal. The work breakdown plan can be used to develop the team's GANTT chart.

**3. Scribe action items and maintain an Open Action Items list:** The meeting scribe records all the actions emanating from team decisions, including the person who is responsible for completing the task and the deadline they have provided. A special scribe form is used that makes it very easy to see who “took the hook” for a task. All the actions at team meetings are transferred to the Open Action Items list and those overdue are reviewed at start of subsequent team meetings. No missed deadlines are removed from the list, but rather they are crossed off to show when the deadlines were originally assigned. This process of always asking who will take the hook for the action and when they anticipate getting it done is critical to accountability. Assigning tasks to the team as a whole or even a sub-team is not effective.

**4. The RACI Chart and the Hand Off Plan.** Also attached to the team charter is the RACI chart which defines who is **R**esponsible, **A**ccountable, **C**onsulted, and **I**nformed (the RACI acronym) for all major activities/decisions of the team. The RACI chart immediately points out when confusion exists about accountability – either because too many different people have assumed accountability or because no one has assumed accountability. Accountability for the RACI is defined as “veto power” or having the final hook for a task or decision. The process of building the RACI chart clarifies all the “holes” especially when multiple teams have to interact with each other to achieve common goals.

**The team coach/manager also completes a hand-off plan** detailing what tasks will be delegated to the team, by when and with what training provided. The hand-off plan helps to ensure that tasks are not dumped on the team too soon in its development.



**5. Team assessments and measurements.** The process observer begins giving feedback to the team on its performance at the very first meeting, after the development of the team’s help/hinder list. Three months later, the team completes its first performance thermometers, with each member providing feedback on team meetings, member accountability, team conflicts and team atmosphere. The team also maintains its daily measurement system that tracks key results that are reviewed at the team’s daily huddle before work begins. Team members get used to giving and receiving feedback on a regular basis about how the team and individual members own their deliverables.

Accountability doesn't happen when we assign it to a team of people; it only happens when an "I" steps up and agrees to ownership. Teams must structure how that stepping-up process will occur and be reviewed on a regular basis. Without an accountability structure in place, it's too easy for teams to let "to do's" slip into "past do's," or to let some team members over-function while others under-function.

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Deborah Mackin is the founder of New Directions Consulting, Inc. in North Bennington, Vermont, and is a successful international consultant, trainer, author and presenter whose clients have included Delta Faucet, SI Group, Hemmings Motor News, and Sanofi Pasteur (formerly Aventis) to name a few. She was a featured author/presenter at the University of North Texas conference on teams in September, 2007.

Deborah is also the author of the new *Team Building Tool Kit, Second Edition*, published by AMACOM Books. Go to [www.NewDirectionsConsulting.com](http://www.NewDirectionsConsulting.com) to order your copy today!