

Personal Accountability



The one indispensable behavior or skill for any employee, whether a manager or individual contributor, is personal accountability. Lack of personal accountability not only hurts one's promotion opportunities; it also affects job security.

In contrast, being known for responsibility and reliability, will lead an employee to a rich and rewarding career. Acquiring a reputation for personal accountability will offset many significant skill and behavioral deficiencies.

■ What are the characteristics of accountable people?

Highly dependable employees take ownership of the work and see assignments through to successful conclusion. Fully accountable people take responsibility and are also willing to answer for the outcome of their work, both positive and negative. Furthermore, these unique individuals own their choices, behaviors, and actions.

When things go wrong, personally accountable employees do not blame others for subpar results. Instead, they do their best to make things right through additional work; in other words, they vigorously pursue solutions when a problem arises.

■ Why is personal accountability so critical?

From the company and a manager's perspective, highly accountable, "get it done" people require less oversight, create fewer errors, and deliver top results. These are the employees companies value the most and must supervise the least.

■ The intersection between accountability and personal branding

A reputation and personal brand are built any time a person commits or seems to commit to a given action. The affected parties assume the work will be performed to an acceptable quality standard and completed on time. Failure to deliver the expected results on time hurts a person's reputation. Furthermore, by neglecting to inform the stakeholders well ahead of time of issue, the reputational damage is magnified. If this situation repeats, a personal brand for unreliability emerges that is subsequently hard to change.

■ Underdeveloped work habits, lack of processes, and behavioral misalignment

Why do some people struggle with accountability? Based upon Performex's internal data, accountability issues are most often the result of poor work habits; a lack of processes such as prioritization, planning skills, setting goals and micro-goals, and proactive communications; failure to deliberately build a positive personal brand; and using poor time management techniques.

Certain attitudes are required for accountability. Self-discipline is needed to adhere to a best practice or process. Seeking the self-satisfaction that comes from completing a job on time is another. A desire for respect and to be a good teammate is a third critical attitude.

Some other less obvious behaviors are also important. Most people with accountability issues also blame others for their shortcomings. They choose to ignore their contribution to the problem and fail to think about how they could resolve it.

■ How you will improve

Prioritization and planning

1. Refine your problem-solving and planning skills when tackling unique and challenging assignments.

Get training to help you gain proficiency. Your goal is to overcome obstacles that in the past, held you back from success.

2. Dedicate an appropriate amount of time to issues and opportunities. Review the Eisenhower decision matrix to become highly skilled at setting priorities and knowing which items are important, urgent, or both. Your goal is to stop wasting time and to make sure important but not urgent items get completed.
3. Develop and practice the habit of identifying and internalizing the five most important issues or assignments on your "plate." Your goal is to stay focused, organized, and understand what is important in real time. Doing so will help you make better day-to-day decisions.



Setting goals and micro-goals

Set realistic and achievable objectives and deadlines to ensure success in your area of responsibility. Do not promise to deliver stretch goals and deadlines that will be exceedingly difficult to meet. Your goal is to always accomplish tasks on time with exceptional quality and superior results.

Communicating for accountability

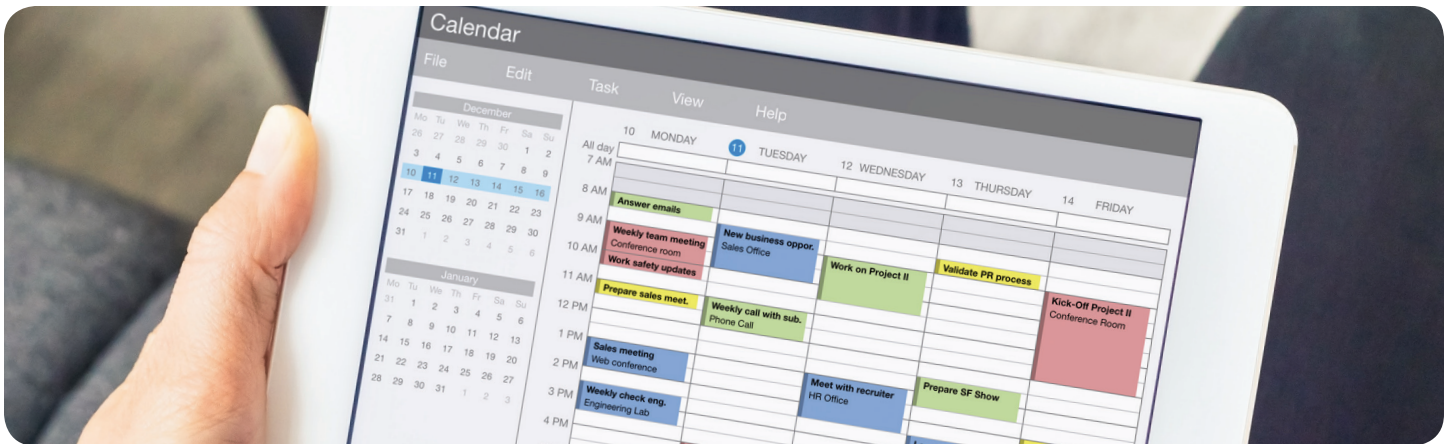
1. Let others know well in advance if you are struggling with completing your assignments. Better yet, let them know as soon as possible if you encounter serious obstacles or setbacks. Your goal is to make sure no one is ever surprised by missed deadlines or deliverables not being met.



2. When you are assigned new tasks, listen to and repeat the details to clarify and confirm expectations. Then document the specific requirements and expected outcomes for the assignment. Your goal is to understand the full scope and objectives, what is expected and why, and to whom it is advantageous.
 3. Agreeing to do the work is your personal guarantee the job will get done. As a result, there will be times when you should say no to work, even though it will disappoint others. Learn how to deliver bad news. Prepare for the conversation, then be compassionate but direct. Expect pushback, and be prepared to reconsider your position but also to stand firm as appropriate. Your goal is to establish trust in your word. Never agree to do something on the front end that you do not intend to do. Do not be vague about your commitment.
2. Beyond being generally motivated to do your job, have an internal “extra gear” that allows you to ramp up your focus and effort to accomplish a great deal of work in a short period of time.
 3. Practice tenacity—learn to overcome organizational boundaries when they hold you back from successfully completing tasks. Too often, people allow themselves to fail by fearing stepping on some else’s toes or entering a turf war. Your goal is to become highly skilled at going beyond your department and working with other functions to reach your goals.
 4. Truly accountable people do not take the easy way out and blame others when things go wrong. Not making excuses or blaming others requires self-discipline and self-control. Your goal is to build trust by taking personal responsibility for overcoming obstacles and resolving problems.
 5. Become agile, and accept risk as necessary for innovation. New assignments often require doing new things and taking chances. Fear of being incompetent or of failure holds some people back from success. Learn how to tackle challenging new assignments. Your goal is to become confident enough that you can get the job done even when it is unique, outside of your comfort zone, or mundane.

Attitudes and behaviors

1. Study and incorporate self-motivation techniques. Otherwise, even minor obstacles can hold you back. Your goal is to be motivated and willing to do whatever it takes to deliver or exceed the expected results. By refusing to deliver poor results, you will develop the essential skills for success.
1. Your crucial brand image is to be indispensable, meaning you are so good and efficient at your job that your boss and coworkers could not envision being successful without you. Realize the other person sees your agreement as an ironclad obligation for you to accomplish the task. If you require cajoling or frequent reminders to meet your commitments, your reputation will still be diminished. If you routinely affect someone’s ability to do their job, trouble is at hand. Your goal is to take pride in being viewed as exceptionally reliable by all your peers, internal and external customers, your manager, and the senior management team.



2. Make sure you understand the why behind the assignment. The why is the value and benefit stakeholders will receive when the assignment is completed. Be proactive by asking for input and feedback on how your actions will now and in the future affect stakeholders. Your goal is to align your work with the stakeholder's goals.
3. Admit your mistakes proactively and accurately so that people see you as trustworthy, honest, and keenly focused on delivering results. Your goal is to be famous for the pursuit of excellence, even if it requires a redo.

Time management

Some people struggle with how to do their jobs or new assignments. Fear may set in, and in some cases, people seem to lock up and therefore fail to begin their assignments. The delayed start results in even more stress and a real danger of not getting results on time. A destructive cycle starts where the delay increases stress, which fosters more procrastination. Your goal is to get started by well before the required due date. Stop procrastinating, and you will seldom miss deadlines or fail to meet stretch objectives.

When you lack a skill or knowledge, relentlessly pursue closing those gaps by finding the information and implementing a plan to do better. Instead of waiting for an

obstacle or problem to correct itself, immediately think of alternative ways to complete the work or project. Your goal is to quickly overcome obstacles so you can meet deadlines on time.

■ The bottom line

Many people with personal accountability issues fail to realize how detrimental failure is to their job security. From a manager's perspective, chronic accountability issues create negative feelings toward an employee. Unfortunately, most employees who are not dependable eventually lose their jobs. Many people believe their other characteristics or skills will help them overcome accountability issues. They will not. All of this is to say that if you have been labeled as having accountability issues, then fix it, and fix it fast.

■ Take ownership by being responsible for your behavior and outcomes

Finally, as you become more reliable, make the improvement known by closing out assignments in an open and formal way. Seek feedback by telling your boss or coworker, "I've just completed project X. I hope it met your expectations. If not, please let me know right away." This simple statement advertises your success, your service orientation, and your can-do attitude.