

ON STAFF AND SELF ACCOUNTABILITY FOR SALES GROWTH

THE TAKE AWAY

This article will build your responsibility muscles by helping you stay accountable for progress regardless of your pace or the outcome.

THE COACHING

Listen to the first post-game or race questions from family and friends of any age athlete. Always you will hear, “Who won? What was the score? Where did you place?”

We justify our score focus the way we justify consuming news headlines. “I do it to stay informed”, we proclaim. Yet an endless and repetitive cycle of news rarely enhances our understanding of an issue or alters our civic behavior. The same is true of year-end or month-end sales metrics.

News briefs, like scores, can be useful. But headlines, scores and sales numbers only reveal a glimpse of what we think we need. Final tallies give no insight to what matters most about our performance: the path to get there, the effort expended and the lessons to next apply on our growth journey.

We mostly pay lip service to the more substantive and enduring questions about our pursuits, such as, “How was the experience for me? What did I learn? What could I have changed? What was a highlight moment? What was hardest? Why?”

Imagine asking those questions to a soccer kid each and every time she came off of the pitch instead of, “Did you win?”!

The best place to assess performance isn’t at the end of any pursuit where we have no control over outcomes but throughout the experience of getting there: the journey, as it were, not the destination; for that is where accountabilities lie.

We only need five basic tools for the trip:

1. **A goal.** It doesn’t matter what you call it, any performance journey needs a destination, a target, an aspiration, something that can ignite our desire to act. But ignition is precisely that: a start. More is needed to keep any flame alive. The beautiful thing about goals is that they can morph into deadlines.
2. **A deadline.** Be it a due date or a time limit, deadlines have the miraculous ability to keep us on track and they work their magic in any increment. I often set a timer for 30 minutes to help constrain my ADD monkey mind when I set about a desk task. The beautiful thing about a deadline is that it can morph into a schedule.
3. **A schedule.** Whether I use a calendar or a clock, a schedule gives me waypoints against which I can measure my activity. A schedule is clear, it’s trackable and can be as empty or full as I want to make it. Thus, it functions more like a corral than a cage; it keeps us where we belong but offers room to maneuver for balance between two poles: ease and rigor.

4. **Balance.** This is the Holy Grail. Finding balance forces us to ask questions like: How often and how long must I tilt toward the extreme end of effort, fortitude and challenge or the opposite direction toward relaxation, spaciousness and ease? Do I hold fast to a deadline or forgive it? Do I force myself out of bed or sleep in? Do I, stick to the schedule or remain flexible? The answers always come back to balance.

5. **Support.** Be they people, places or things, support for any pursuit comes in many forms. If I am lucky enough to have teammates then I have potential accountability partners for the trip. If it's a solo journey then I find support from rituals, objects or environments: anything that buoys my resolve, reanimates or centers me.

Simply telling ourselves we must be accountable provides no lift. It's like telling someone they should be nice; it's easy to do when the going is easy. What if I'm exhausted, angry, late or hungry? The best advice then isn't to be nice: it's to take a nap, take a breath or take a bite.

Accountability is similar in that it's easiest when we are on target, in rhythm and feeling strong, focused and fulfilled. But that's not when we need accountability. We need it when we are demoralized, confused, scared, lost or lazy. It is then that we have to integrate one or all five of the tools from our kit. Join me, won't you?

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