How to Establish Accountability
By Norb Slowikowski

Accountability means keeping track of what’s going on to assure that the results of operations conform closely to established goals or standards. Another word for accountability is control, which is a key functional skill in the management process. Without an accountability system, organizations flounder, and people tend to become frustrated. Then, confusion and chaos result. Four elements are always present in the control process:

Standards that represent desired performance. A performance standard is a written statement of conditions that will exist when a satisfactory job is done. It is a mutual understanding between manager and employee of desired results.
- How many sheets of drywall do you want hung per day?
- How much square footage of ceiling tiles do you want installed per day?
- How many estimated hours does the foreman have to complete the job?
- What are your standards for installing studs, wallboard and finishing? How much do you expect or want installed per day?
- What is the quality standard for the above items? Have you reviewed the specs with the foremen?
- How do you want the finished product to look?

By setting standards you are providing benefits to your foreman. He then knows exactly what you expect from him while on the job. It also helps the foreman evaluate his own progress and organize his work better. In addition, it gets a new foreman started on the right track. It provides the superintendent or project manager with a tool for evaluating the foreman’s performance.

Evaluate performance against desired results. Everybody likes to know how they are doing on the job. How is the foreman doing with respect to meeting the expected standards? Is he on target? Is he progressing better than the standard? These are things the superintendent or project manager have to watch out for so he can meet the construction schedule. If there are problems or obstacles that act in the way of achieving the standard, corrective action needs to be taken.

In order for the superintendent or project manager to effectively evaluate the foreman’s performance, he must be visible in the field and take the time to monitor how the foreman is doing.

Once that judgment or evaluation is made, the superintendent or project manager must give feedback to the foreman as to how he’s doing. If the standards are not being met, he must suggest ideas for corrective action to improve performance.

Coach to help the employee remove barriers to optimum work performance. The coaching sequence requires the following:
- Clearly define the problem or identify the barrier.
- Be clear about the expected standard.
- Make sure you’ve told the employee what results you want and the expected date of completion.
- Determine if the obstacle is beyond the employee’s control to remove.
- Make sure the employee has the talent, skills and ability to achieve the desired results.
- Decide what you’re going to do to help the employee, and then do it.

Administer corrective discipline. If the employee’s performance does not improve after coaching, administer discipline. The supervisor should meet with the employee again and express his dissatisfaction for continued substandard performance. He should tell the employee what the consequences will be if there is not any improvement. It is important that the supervisor document the performance problems in writing along with the possible consequences. The ball is now in the employee’s court. The employee must now decide if he wants to keep his job.

If performance improves, provide positive reinforcement. If performance does not improve, deliver the consequences.

About the Author
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