



TWO WAYS TO SEE ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability: Authority vs. Influence

Both are real, and strong leaders use both. But only one of them works when the person in front of you doesn't report to you.

Accountability by authority

- Accountability is what happens when my manager checks whether I did what I was supposed to do.
- The question I ask is "How do I get them to do it?"
- It rests on position, formal power, and consequences.
- It mostly runs up and down the org chart.
- Every missed commitment travels up to someone with the power to settle it.
- Only people with the title feel allowed to have the conversation.
- Standards hold when someone is watching.
- Peers treat accountability as the manager's job, so they stay quiet.

Accountability by influence

- Accountability is something we practice with each other, because our commitments and behavior affect each other.
- The question I ask is "How do we create ownership and follow-through?"
- It rests on shared expectations, trust, and clear commitments.
- It runs sideways and upward as well as down.
- The people closest to the problem settle it before it needs to escalate.
- Anyone willing to practice the skills can have the conversation.
- Standards hold because people agreed to them.
- Colleagues treat accountability as part of working together.

Neither column is the bad one, and authority isn't the same as coercion. The question to carry into your next hard conversation: instead of "Who has the authority to hold this person accountable?" ask "What responsibility do I have to practice accountability in this relationship?"