

## Communicating About Accountability

Here are a few management tips for communication that enhances accountability

**1. Talk about the right things.** Before you begin a crucial communication, think “CPR” (Content, Pattern, Relationship).

Our natural inclination during a crucial confrontation is to talk content—what just happened. For example, if an employee misses a deadline, you might ask why he or she missed the deadline. But what if your coworker continues to miss deadlines? If it’s the second or third offense, you should change the topic.

Instead of talking content again (“why did you miss the deadline?”), talk pattern (“It’s not just this one instance of missing a deadline that has me concerned. This is the third time you’ve missed the deadline. It’s the trend of missing deadlines that I’d like to talk about.”).

If the infractions continue, talk relationship (“Could we talk about our working relationship for a moment? For some reason you have continued to miss your deadlines. I’m beginning to feel like I can’t rely on you anymore and that I need to start tracking you—and I don’t want to work like this. I’m curious, what role do you see me playing here?”)

**2. Make it motivating.** If the other person is able to do what’s been asked, but has chosen not to, don’t start with power. Using discipline and other tactics is one of the worst ways to motivate. At some point, it may be necessary to fall back on power; just don’t start with it.

Instead, start by making the invisible visible. Talk about natural consequences that the other person cares about, both good and bad. What is the effect of the behavior on other employees, customers, or shareowners?

**3. Make it easy.** Not all problems are due to motivation; sometimes the problem is one of ability. Maybe our expectations aren’t realistic. Maybe we haven’t provided the person with the right tools. Maybe the person is constrained because of bureaucracy. Whatever the constraints, we need to discover them and make changes. The goal is to make it as easy as possible for the person to meet expectations.

This, of course, is just a sample of what it takes to enhance accountability. The good news is that these and the other skills routinely demonstrated by top performers can be learned.