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BOOST ACCOUNTABILITY IN YOUR TEAM THROUGH EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION: ACCOUNTABILITY AS A GROWTH ENGINE

Accountability often carries negative connotations - it can sound like blame, surveillance, or control. But in thriving veterinary practices, accountability is not about punishment. It is about clarity, ownership, and alignment: each person knowing what is expected of them, why it matters, and how to deliver it.

Effective performance management transforms accountability into a growth engine - ensuring that every individual is supported to meet standards, achieve goals, and contribute to the shared mission. Coaching plays a central role here, especially when performance dips or attitudes become barriers.

This session explores practical strategies for embedding accountability through coaching, feedback, goal-setting, and development. We'll also consider the significance of mindset and mastery in reshaping belief systems - moving teams from "*I can't*" to "*I can.*"

MASTERY AND MINDSET: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Growth mindset theory (Carol Dweck, 2006) is helpful when there is a need to build accountability. A fixed mindset believes ability is innate and therefore failure is evidence of lack of talent. Whereas a growth mindset believes ability develops through effort, feedback, and learning and therefore it is seen more positively. In accountability, this distinction matters: fixed mindset team members may resist feedback, while growth mindset individuals see it as a path to mastery.

Mastery (Anders Ericsson, 1993) theories suggest that it is achieved not through repetition alone, but through deliberate practice - focused effort with feedback and reflection. Coaching can be used to support this reflection and to ensure it's relevance. In practice management, mastery is supported when goals are clear, progress is measured, and individuals are coached to improve step by step. For example, questioning an individual as to 'what went well?' and 'what could have been improved?' will help to maintain focus on the areas that need improving. By asking the individual to work this out themselves and then coaching them to find the methods to improve gives them the belief they can improve and so increases their ability to master things.

VALUES, COMMON GOALS, AND SHARED PURPOSE



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Accountability is not just individual - it is collective. A strong accountability culture requires alignment with shared values, common goals, and a clear sense of purpose.

Values (the rules to live by) matter as they guide behaviour when no one is watching. When accountability is rooted in values (e.g., compassion, integrity), it feels less like control and more like commitment.

Patrick Lencioni in 'The Five Dysfunctions of a Team' describes how lack of accountability often stems from lack of commitment to shared goals. Accountability is easier when everyone is working toward a common purpose e.g. excellent patient care, seamless operations, sustainable growth. Clear team goals reinforce unity and individual goals connect each person to the bigger picture. Indeed Stephen Covey states that clarity of purpose and values is the way to create a self-managing culture.

KPIS AND OKRS: MAKING ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURABLE

Abstract values need concrete measures. Performance management is strengthened through Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Objectives and Key Results (OKRs).

KPIs are quantitative metrics that measure ongoing performance (e.g. client satisfaction scores, diary fill rates, revenue per vet/ vet nurse, active client numbers). They are useful for tracking progress, but can feel rigid if overemphasised.

OKRs were developed by Andy Grove (Intel) and popularised by John Doerr (*Measure What Matters*, 2018). The objective is inspirational and qualitative e.g. "Deliver outstanding client care consistently"; And key results are the measurable and time-bound ways of monitoring how successfully the objective is being achieved e.g. "Achieve 95% client satisfaction scores this quarter".

Coaching helps individuals connect personal actions to organisational OKRs and encourages reflection on progress as well as ownership of outcomes.

COACHING WHERE PERFORMANCE NEEDS TO IMPROVE

Not every team member will meet expectations consistently. Accountability requires that underperformance is addressed swiftly and constructively.

It is important to explore, rather than accuse e.g. "What challenges are you facing in meeting this standard?". Then with active listening and coaching questions identify any barriers such as skill gap, mindset block, unclear expectations, or personal issues. From there GROW or other coaching frameworks can be used to co-create solutions.

Use questioning around the **goal** to clarify what success looks like. Explore the current performance honestly with clear feedback and what is stopping better performance to establish the **reality**. More curiosity will allow the individual to consider what **options** they have to change their performance and finally pin their commitment down by getting them to say what they **will** do and by when. This process creates accountability in a collaborative way rather than making it a disciplinary process.



HANDLING POOR PERFORMANCE: BALANCING EMPATHY AND STANDARDS

Poor performance left unchecked damages morale and patient experience. But overly punitive approaches can disengage staff. Effective leaders strike a balance by managing themselves to avoid reactive behaviours; using empathy to understand the individual; and by following these principles:

Address issues early - small problems compound if ignored; Be specific and avoid vague feedback - instead focus on observable behaviours; Separate the person from the behaviour - talk about the behaviour or action rather than saying 'you did'; Set clear expectations and timelines in order to give the necessary clarity; and document and follow through - consistency builds trust and fairness.

APPRAISALS AND DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Appraisals can be powerful accountability tools when reframed as developmental, future-focused conversations. To do this jointly review progress against KPIs/OKRs, identify strengths as well as growth areas and build development plans together aligned with both practice goals and individual aspirations. Development Plans could include skill training, mindset coaching, and stretch opportunities; are best reviewed regularly, rather than just annually; and can be used to reinforce accountability by embedding ownership of progress. Whitmore emphasises that effective coaching transforms appraisals into dynamic conversations that inspire responsibility rather than passive compliance.

FEEDBACK: THE FUEL OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability cannot exist without feedback. Delivered well, feedback is constructive, actionable, and motivating. Delivered poorly, it can demoralise and disengage. There are several frameworks to use to give effective feedback which is both caring and direct, so balancing empathy with accountability:

SEEC Model - Specify the behaviour; Explain the effect; Express expectations; Clarify consequences; Confirm understanding.

GREAT Feedback - Goal - what we're aiming for; Reality - what actually happened; Evidence - examples of behaviour; Alternatives - how it could be improved; Timeline - when to follow up.

FBI Method - Feeling – how it made you feel; Behaviour - the specific behaviour observed; Impact – the consequence of that behaviour.

Once the appropriate model for the situation is chosen, the feedback should be given in private, with respect and clarity and then coaching questions can be used to ensure understanding and to explore options for improvement and finally gain commitment for the change. Then the coaches role becomes one of support for the individual as they try to improve.

EMBEDDING ACCOUNTABILITY INTO PRACTICE CULTURE

Accountability should not be an occasional intervention - it should be part of everyday practice culture. To do this leaders can model accountability including admitting mistakes and owning



their results; have short, frequent conversations to check in regularly; celebrate accountability by recognising those who take ownership; and linking accountability to values - accountability is not just about numbers, but about living the practice's ethos.

While accountability requires standards, it must coexist with psychological safety (Edmondson, 2018). Staff must feel safe to admit mistakes and discuss challenges, or accountability becomes fear-based. Coaching balances both: supporting improvement while maintaining trust.

CONCLUSION: ACCOUNTABILITY AS EMPOWERMENT

When done well, accountability is not about control - it is about empowerment. Through coaching, clear goals, feedback, and development plans, teams move from passive compliance to active ownership of their performance.

Mindset and mastery are foundational: cultivating “*I can*” beliefs through coaching drives resilience and growth.

Values, common goals, KPIs, and OKRs provide the framework for accountability.

Coaching transforms underperformance conversations into growth opportunities.

Feedback frameworks (SEEC, GREAT, FBI) offer practical tools for constructive dialogue.

Appraisals and development plans should be dynamic, collaborative, and future-focused.

Accountability embedded in culture leads to a team that is both responsible and empowered.

Accountability is not about “catching people out.” It is about creating a culture where every individual owns their role, embraces growth, and contributes confidently to a shared purpose. With effective performance management, your team can achieve mastery, embody values, and deliver excellence - together.

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