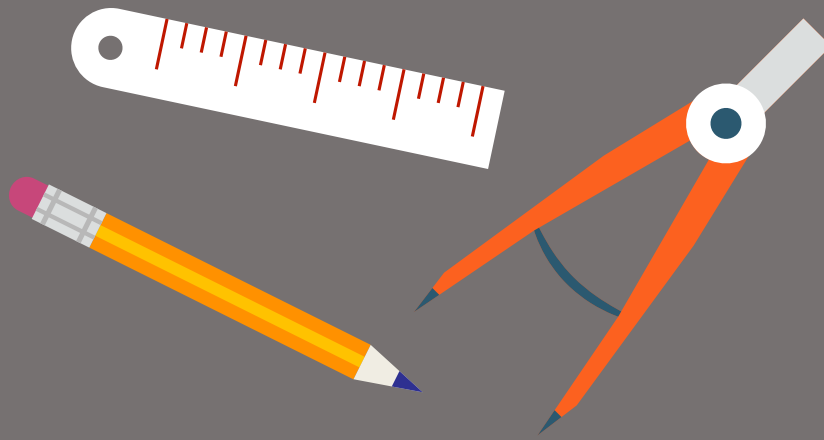


# Holding Accountability Conversations

5 Scripts And Guides To Help  
You Through The Process



PRACTICAL TOOLS

# Holding Accountability Conversations



Knowing what you need from your staff is just one part of the job. Being able to relate it to them, in a way that gets results, is also critical.

To be successful, certain kinds of employee interactions take practice, but that can make all the difference.

Here are scripts for several very common accountability-related interactions managers have with employees.

The scripts can help you prepare for these conversation and be most effective. They can also be used as a road map for similar kinds of conversations and feedback sessions.

## An employee announces there is a problem

**Employee:** "That's what happened, so we're not going to meet the deadline next week."

**Manager:** "I understand what happened. It must have been really frustrating to have those problems pop up. I'll work with you and the team to find a way to get this back on track."

**Employee:** "Whew. I was really worried about coming to you with this problem. I thought you'd be really disappointed, maybe even take it out on me. So ... it's OK that we're not going to meet the deadline?"

**Manager:** "Well, let me say a few things. First, I'm not going to yell at you, but I do have to let you know I am disappointed we won't meet the deadline. It's not 'OK' that we're going to miss it. However, now that I know what happened, we need to move on. Our top priority is to figure how to get this done as soon as possible, still with high quality, even if it's not by the deadline. And I'm glad you came to me when you did. Coming to me at this point will help minimize the problem. I do want to review what happened in a bit

more detail to make sure we do better in the future. We will find out if we could have identified the problems earlier and therefore made our deadline. While this will require some investigation into what went wrong, I'm not looking to place blame. Our top priority is to improve in the future."

## An employee passes the blame along

**Employee:** "Bob really dropped the ball. He knew he had to help with this, but he didn't make time in his schedule. He kept telling everyone about how busy he was and how he didn't have time for 'extra work.' Maybe if he stopped talking about how busy he was, he'd have time to actually help out. Without Bob's help, it's no wonder we lost the contract."

**Manager:** "So how long had Bob been saying that he didn't have time for the project?"

**Employee:** "This went on for weeks. He just kept on complaining about being overworked over and over again."

**Manager:** "So how many weeks ... ?"

**Employee:** "At least four or five, maybe six."

**Manager:** "And what's been the impact of this?"

**Employee:** "Without Bob's expertise, there were key parts of the proposal that weren't complete. In some cases, we had to scramble to get the information from somewhere else. In some cases, we couldn't do anything because Bob was the only one with the information we need."

**Manager:** "I'll certainly talk to Bob. Now we have a missed opportunity because of this. Our competitor got the contract. I wish I'd known earlier that Bob was feeling overwhelmed by his workload."

**Employee:** "Well, he sure talked to everyone else about it – a lot."

**Manager:** “There’s something else that could have helped this situation. I should have known about this earlier. One thing I’m going to do is figure out how I can stay in better touch with the team so I know about problems earlier. And there’s something I need to ask you to do. When situations like this come up in the future, I need you to let me know about it as soon as possible.”

**Employee:** “Wait a minute, are you blaming me for this?”

**Manager:** “I’m not looking to place blame. At this point, I want to find out how to make sure this doesn’t happen again. Knowing that Bob was feeling overwhelmed sooner might have produced a different outcome – we might have won that contract.”

**Employee:** “But wasn’t it Bob’s responsibility to come to you?”

**Manager:** “Yes. And it was my responsibility to keep on top of this. And as the lead on this project, it was your responsibility, too. We all have a responsibility to update each other along the way. I now know that I needed to check in more. Let’s talk about how we could have handled this situation differently, before it got out of control – how we could have communicated better. That way we can put measures in place to prevent it from happening again.”

## Employee says he ‘isn’t motivated’

**Employee:** “I’ve been doing the exact same job for 18 months now. I expected when I started that I’d move up the ladder faster. There’s no end in sight to this for me. I don’t feel motivated to keep doing the same thing, every day, over and over again.”

**Manager:** “I understand how you feel. It must be frustrating to think that you’re not progressing in your career. But I see the progress you’ve made in the last 18 months. Sales are up. Customers are reporting better satisfaction with our product. And that’s not to mention all that I know you’ve learned in the last year and a half. You are the go-to person when it comes to your area, without question.”

**Employee:** “Thanks, I appreciate that, I guess. But if it means just doing more of the same, I don’t know. I think I’m ready for bigger challenges.”

**Manager:** “I agree. You are ready for more challenges. So what I hear you saying is that you don’t think there are any more challenges in your current position – is that right?”

**Employee:** “Right, that’s exactly what I’m saying.”

**Manager:** “Well, what you’ve accomplished – and we hope you’ll continue to accomplish – is key to the company’s growth. Sales and customer satisfaction are back up, due in large part to your hard work. We appreciate that. But there are more challenges waiting for you in your current position, and we need you there for now. One of those challenges is to sustain the sales growth you’ve achieved and improve on it even more. By growing sales in your area, we’re able to pursue the company’s biggest goal, Project One. Current sales are helping fund its development. When it’s ready to launch, we’re going to need your expertise again to help make Project One a success. But until then, we need you to keep sales and customer satisfaction at top levels where they are now. It supports the future growth of the company.”

## When an employee isn’t meeting expectations

Making certain employees understand what is expected of them is crucial to creating and maintaining a productive organization. However, one of the more common failures managers are guilty of is failing to state expectations clearly, or allowing expectations to go grow vague as time passes.

Here is a six-step, conversational approach to setting and keeping expectations.

### 1. Let the employee know the purpose of the conversation

“I want to discuss your performance and how we need it to improve. This conversation isn’t about punishment or to lay blame for something that has or hasn’t happened. I want to help solve any problems together with your input.”

**2. Review the expectations, what actually occurred, and what the exact gap is between the two**

“It was my intention to have this project done within a week. Three weeks have passed, and you are still working on it.” What is said in this situation will be specific to the circumstances involved. Most important is laying out the three parts: expectations, what actually happened, and what the difference is between the two.

**3. Determine what the real obstacles were to meeting expectations**

“I just want to make sure I understand. You’re saying the project didn’t meet expectations because (restate what employee has said).”

**4. Find solutions together**

“Let’s brainstorm some possible solutions to this problem. If we agree on what steps to take, we’ll create an action plan for the next steps. We’ll continue the discussion until we come up with solutions we agree on.”

**5. Point out how this impacts the company and others (co-workers, customers, and other stakeholders)**

This conversation will be specific to the situation. But it should include the impact on the various groups and people listed above.

**6. Summarize**

“To make sure we’re on the same page, I’d like to review what you told me, what we agreed were the biggest reasons why we had this problem, and the steps we’re going to take to improve our performance in the future. Please let me know if you think I’m misstating something or if there is something you don’t understand.”

## Delegating responsibility

Another common activity for managers is delegating responsibility for a project or task to an employee. It is another interaction that, if not done well, will create gaps in accountability and outcomes.

So when preparing for this type of conversation, here is a checklist you can reference to help stay on track:

- Describe the expected results
- Relate the results to specific tasks
- Define how success (or lack of it) will be measured
- Develop (with the employee's input) check-in points to measure mid-project progress
- Set due dates
- Link results/tasks to things that motivate the specific employee
- Relate the employee's potential personal success to the success of the company
- Show your confidence in the employee's ability to achieve the desired results
- Ask for the employee's commitment to the task (Can I count on you?)
- Spell out consequences, both good for successful completion and bad for shortfalls