

The Accountability Pathway

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1. If Only We Could “Just Do It!”

How many times at work, at home or in your community do you say, “I’ll do it!” and then just not get it done? Getting it done isn’t that easy. We often don’t have the tools and skills or simply don’t follow through. We need to be accountable for our commitments to action and take the time to make them a priority.

2. The Accountability Pathway

Accountability is the ability to make commitments to action, then keep those commitments, or acknowledge that you haven’t, and figure out what you need to do to move to action. Many people’s experiences with accountability conversations are negative and often associated with punishment or shame rather than learning or celebration. The Accountability Pathway creates conversations about keeping commitments that are interesting, meaningful, engaging and lead to more effective action.

The Accountability Pathway graphically presents the different choices we make after we commit to do something. Keep the following in mind as you think about the Accountability Pathway:

- Accountability is developmental. You can be at different stages along the Pathway at work, with your family or in your community.
- Discussing accountability feels uncomfortable. However, you can explore the sources of your discomfort and use those insights to become better at making and keeping commitments.
- Using the Accountability Pathway can minimize your and others’ frustration when you struggle to keep commitments, or are unproductively critical of yourself and others, and/or get stuck because no progress is being made but the topic is avoided and not discussed.
- The process can lead to discoveries about how to make and keep commitments that move you from talk to actions that produce the desired results – the results that make things better for you and others.

3. What’s In It for You?

Get more action and results. The Accountability Pathway helps you be clear in your commitments and able to directly address whether you did or didn’t keep those commitments. Conversations about the choices we make after we make commitments and the consequences of those choices are often avoided or handled ineffectively. Used deftly, the Accountability Pathway brings light and lightness to these difficult conversations and helps you walk the talk of more effective commitments to action.

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4. How to Walk and Talk the Accountability Pathway

1. Display the Pathway – on a piece of paper for yourself or on the wall for use with a group.
2. Use the Pathway to review progress on commitments to action – did you make it? Where did you get stuck along the way? What helped you move along?
3. Encourage your own self-awareness and acceptance as you see where you are on the path.
4. Note where you are on your paper. When in a group, walk to that place at the wall poster.
5. Reflect on your own and/or explore with colleagues what might help you to move along the Pathway to “make it happen!”

5. The Talk that Helps You Walk

The following is an example of what it sounds like when you talk about how to move along the Accountability Pathway.

The conversation below is an example of two people using the Accountability Pathway to learn how to move along from wherever they are to action. The conversation is between a “pathfinder” who is using the Pathway as a tool to guide the conversation and an “action owner” who has just used the Accountability Pathway to review their progress on a commitment they made.

Pathfinder: *You reviewed progress on your action commitments. What did you discover?*

Action owner: *Oh, I completely forgot what I said I would do. (Unaware)
I thought I was going to get a reminder in the notes, but I didn't see the email. (Blame others) You know, I am so busy, that without someone reminding me, I can't fit this sort of thing into my schedule. (I can't excuses)*

Pathfinder: *Is this something you are still interested in doing? (Appreciative Inquiry to see if the commitment still exists)*

Action owner: *Yes... it is a good idea and if I could do it, it would make a difference. (Affirming ownership of commitment)*

Pathfinder: *What might help you? (Appreciative Inquiry to see what stage the person is in after affirming the commitment)*

Action owner: *Well...maybe this time I'll remember... (Wait and hope)*

Pathfinder: *Is this coming week going to be as busy as last week? (Effective Question to move the participant from “Wait and hope” to “Acknowledge reality”)*

Action owner: *No...it actually will be even busier. (Acknowledge reality)*

Pathfinder: *Is it important to get this done now? (Effective Question to check ownership of commitment again)*

Action owner: *Yes, I have to do it this week; next week will be too late. (Own it)*

Pathfinder: *Is there something that you might do that could help you get this done even in a busy week? Anything that has helped you under other circumstances? (Effective Question to move to “find solutions”)*

Action owner: *Hmm...I can write it down on my calendar for tomorrow morning and tell my supervisor that I have to get this done first thing in the morning...before I forget! (Find solutions)*

Pathfinder: *Anything else you can do now to make it more likely you can do it? (Effective Question to move to Make “it” happen!)*

Action owner: *Yes, I'll pull out my calendar right now and write it in. Also, during the break I'll call my supervisor and get their support for me spending some time on this. This will actually help my whole unit and I know my supervisor is interested in this too. (Make “it” happen)*