

Chapter 27

The Accountability Issue

Most humans do not crave accountability. Putting it mildly, most humans resist accountability. Yet at the Mission, we know that accountability is one of the important services we offer to our clients. We will consider two aspects:

How do we interest clients
in accepting accountability from us?

How do we maintain an atmosphere of “helping”
while practicing accountability?

First, let’s be sure we have an accurate definition of accountability. As staff at a Rescue Mission, what are we offering our clients when we offer accountability?

Accountability is NOT controlling a person’s behavior. It is not managing their compliance with rules. Accountability is a loving commitment made with the view to assisting a person to succeed in a goal they, themselves, have set. Accountability means giving clients confidentiality without judgment, creating a safe atmosphere to fall and get back up. It is part of the process of change.



A major way that we can help our clients succeed is to influence them in practicing honesty. Check out your own experience. What percentage of your clients who lose their program status or who drop out have not yet learned personal honesty? Our clients come to us with limited proof of integrity and often without any experience in the practice of honesty. So we offer them a way to grow through accountability. We usually dislike accountability because it forces us to grow in humility. It is a humble person who says, “I need help in being truthful.”

Another underlying reason all humans resist accountability is a misunderstanding of control. Human beings like control. Actually, it is in our DNA from creation. The problem is, we mix up what it is that we are to control. Self-control is rated high in Scripture, whereas the attempted control of others is unwise. As we discuss accountability with the client, we must show that the result is increased self-control. When I am acting as an accountability partner with the client, I am merely giving them a boost in their ability to retain control of their behaviors.

What Techniques Do We Use to Make Accountability Work?

We start by getting on the same page. What goal does the client have, that you agree with, that requires commitment? Does the client understand that having a partner in reaching that goal is a scriptural and wise practice?

As you introduce the concept of accountability to the client, insist that the responsibility to set goals and to plan the accomplishment of those goals belongs to the client. Invite them to design a personal accountability plan including giving permission to hold themselves accountable as one of the steps to achieving accountability and subsequent success. Without setting agreed-upon goals, there can be no accountability.

***“Accountability only has strength
when there is a buy in of the goal.” - CW Rucker***

For the client who has rarely received any affirmation, simple accountability promotes this experience. Having goals that are small enough to accomplish, and then to be praised for that accomplishment, puts the whole tone of accountability in a very desirable form. Success is a strong motivator in developing new habits and practices and the art of accountability will promote that motivation.

Truth is a great educator! We can easily teach about scriptural accountability by looking at Scripture regarding our accountability to God (Romans 14:10-12). Helping the client to see that by utilizing God’s provision of having human partners in accountability, we grow in our eagerness to have accountability with God.

At City Union Mission, we developed a practice among staff called “catch ’em being good.” Every day, and especially in every team meeting, before we shared something negative about a client’s lack of progress, we had to state something that showed the positive. This certainly changed our perspective and instead of making our meetings longer with extra reporting, we noticed the paragraphs of “gripping” became significantly shorter.

David Busick at Opportunity Farm in Warsaw, Missouri, practices accountability by asking questions to uncover the truth. This practice allows you to move beyond everybody-from-the-same-cookie-cutter checklist approach. Asking questions and letting the client think through his or her actions promotes self-accountability.

Motivation to seek accountability is increased, both from seeing the value in practicing it, and also seeing the potential harm in refusing it. Once I learn the biblical principle of sowing and reaping, I will see accountability as a way to avoid negative consequences (Galatians 6:7).

If you would succeed in instilling an appreciation for accountability in the life of your client, you yourself must be willing to be accountable in front of each of them. That means if I am late to an appointment I better be willing to ask their forgiveness and give a rational reason for my lateness. Accountability is always a two-way street. Even Almighty God has been explicit in making sure we know from Scripture that He does what He says He will do, and that He keeps His promises (Deuteronomy 7:9; Titus 1:2). I am to follow His example.

Galatians 6:1 (NIV)

“Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.”

Romans 14:12 (NIV)

“So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.”

Jeremiah 17:10 (NIV)

“I the LORD search the heart
and examine the mind,
to reward each person according to their conduct,
according to what their deeds deserve.”

Luke 16:10-12 (NIV)

“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?”