



Accountability: Your Sales Leadership Secret Weapon



It's been two decades since I had to fire three of my top reps within the first hour of the day. Back-to-back-to-back. Without warning.

It was my fault. As their sales leader, I had not created a culture of accountability. The CEO could have fired me, instead, he told me to clean up the mess I'd made. The memory still makes me sick to my stomach, knowing that because I didn't do my job as a leader three reps lost their jobs.

Something else that makes me cringe? Globally, only 54% of sales professionals are hitting quota. I have an idea about why this is happening, but I need my bodyguard when I talk about it. Why? Because if I'm blunt (and I often am) sales leaders might want to cause me bodily harm. Here it is: The biggest reason reps aren't hitting quota is that sales leaders are NOT holding them accountable for doing so.

A culture of accountability should be required by every CEO, but it's not. As a sales leader you should have to explain how you have built AND executed a culture of accountability at other organizations during

the interview process to make it to the final round of candidates. And if you get the job and don't hold your reps accountable, you should be fired. But many sales leaders have had no training on how to build that kind of culture.

As a trainer, consultant, and coach who often assists with hiring I ask my sales leaders if they are willing to build and maintain a culture of accountability.

Culture starts at the top. The sales leader must be holding themselves accountable for:

- Interviewing for accountability.
- Communicating expectations early and clearly.
- Establishing consequences for unmet expectations and following through.
- Providing ongoing training, coaching, and mentoring.

That means they're holding their reps accountable for:

- Sourcing at least 20% of their pipeline.
- Having enough deals in their pipeline to hit quota.
- Not leaving stalled deals in their pipeline.
- Actively working on their craft.
- Having a written plan for how they are going to hit quota each quarter.

Demanding accountability from others requires that you demonstrate accountability in your leadership. Take a look in the mirror and ask yourself if you've earned the right to hold others accountable.

If the answer is yes, here's my 8-Step Action Plan for creating an accountability culture in your organization.

1. Hire for accountability

Use behavioral-based interview questions to determine which candidates are willing to be held accountable and which will blame their territory, SDR, or the economy for missing quota.

2. Communicate expectations during the interview

Begin setting expectations during the interview. Candidates need to be educated consumers, which means they must understand that they will be held to non-negotiable expectations. If being held accountable is an issue for them it is best that they use that information to self-select out of the process before an offer is made.

3. Determine team expectations

You should have standard expectations for your team. Some I recommend are being at or above 80% quota, self-sourcing 20% - 30% of their pipeline, CRM hygiene and pipeline discipline, industry expertise, a process for sharing information, and ethics and integrity. Once you determine standard expectations, you can decide if specific reps need additional expectations set, based on past situations.

4. Make accountability a two-way street

Share what your team can expect from you. For example: your leadership style, your communication preferences, frequency of feedback and coaching, your non-negotiables, and standard consequences of failing to meet expectations.

5. Get on the same page and put EVERYTHING in writing

Sit down with each rep and outline what is

expected of them and why you believe those expectations will help them succeed. Check for buy-in and negotiate any expectations you feel they are hedging on. Once you're on the same page, put it all in writing. I also like to ask this question during expectation meetings, "What would you like me to do if you fail to meet any expectation we've agreed to?" Best to cover this before expectations are missed.

6. Tell them how you'll inspect what you expect

How will you monitor expectations? Will this be done during 1:1 meetings? Will you be reviewing the CRM, call recordings, or participating in prospecting calls? Make this clear.

7. Establish consequences BEFORE things go south

Having an accountability culture means communicating what the consequences will be for not meeting expectations. Will there be a verbal warning? PIP plan? Termination?

8. Hold Quarterly Expectation Meetings

It might be tempting to set goals on January 1 and assume that there will be no need to tweak or pivot. You don't have that luxury. Expectations need to be evaluated and adjusted regularly.

Creating a culture of accountability could be your most impactful sales strategy for 2024. Set your team up for success by holding yourself accountable, setting expectations, laying out consequences, and hiring reps that are going to be willing to be held accountable. The best part is the more deeply you incorporate accountability into your culture the greater the dividends. ■

Kristie Jones is the author of *Selling Your Way IN*. She specializes in helping Founders and Sales Leaders improve sales processes, hire top talent, and she speaks on the topic of creating an accountability culture to accelerate revenue growth. Learn more [here](#)