

A woman with glasses is looking upwards with a stressed expression, her hands pressed against her cheeks. She is surrounded by a shower of colorful sticky notes falling from above. In the background, a computer monitor is visible with a sticky note that says "FINAN".

The Accountability Reset

HOW TO REDUCE WASTE, CREATE CONNECTION AND BOOST
PROGRESS AND PERFORMANCE IN A COVID IMPACTED
WORLD



connect@drpaige.au

drpaige.au

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Accountability Drives Success

In my 30 years' experience as a senior leader and in working with my clients, I know that accountability is critical to making progress and achieving outcomes. And multiple research studies agree.

Not convinced?

Just think about any of the frameworks, models or processes that you use with your team or in your organization – whether that's Lean, Agile, your meeting protocols, KPIs, OKRs or the latest transformational change program. Without accountability they become meaningless and ineffective.

It's like flushing water down a drain – a waste of valuable resources.

Time and time again I've seen a lack of accountability cause problems with collaboration and cross functional teams, create low levels of morale, trust and engagement, drive a talent drain through frustration with confused expectations and poor management practices, and impact results through a lack of alignment around key priorities and desired outcomes.

There's no doubt in my mind that accountability is the foundation for purposeful progress and high performance. And in the COVID-impacted world of work it's more important than ever.

The imperative for accountability is real and present, and to meet it we're going to need a reset – An Accountability Reset.

Read more to find out how.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paige". The signature is stylized with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the word.

If we weren't good at it before (and let's face it most of us weren't), the added complexity of the COVID-impacted workforce and workplace can make accountability feel even harder, as workplaces and workers try to get their heads, hearts, and hands around what the 'new normal' looks like. And despite the promise of widespread vaccine distribution, the ongoing challenge of managing local outbreaks means that disruption and uncertainty will be part of the workplace landscape for most of 2021, if not beyond.

Disruption and uncertainty
will be part of the workplace landscape for most of 2021

That's not to say there weren't positives from our COVID experiences of 2020. Many of us are eager to hold onto some of the freedoms and new perspectives that it brought - more family time, less commuting, and a clearer understanding who and what are important to us. In fact, the thought of battling into the office and returning to the 'old routine' fills many of us with dread. A recent Wellbeing Lab survey found that only 39% of workers in Australia felt positively about returning to their workplace.

All the CEOs and senior leaders I work with are expecting a partially distributed workforce to become their new operating normal.

A partially distributed workforce is the new operating normal

As the challenges and opportunities provided by COVID increase,
so does the need to perform.

Organizations that didn't take care of their people by being flexible in their expectations as workers managed the demands of home-schooling or offering support to those who were alone in isolation, face an engagement and talent flight risk in the coming months. Equally, those teams and businesses that were able to provide great customer service despite the chaos and uncertainty, won the hearts, minds and loyalty of clients.

Sustaining purposeful progress and high performance in the
COVID context is critical

This is The Accountability Imperative

An Accountability Crisis?

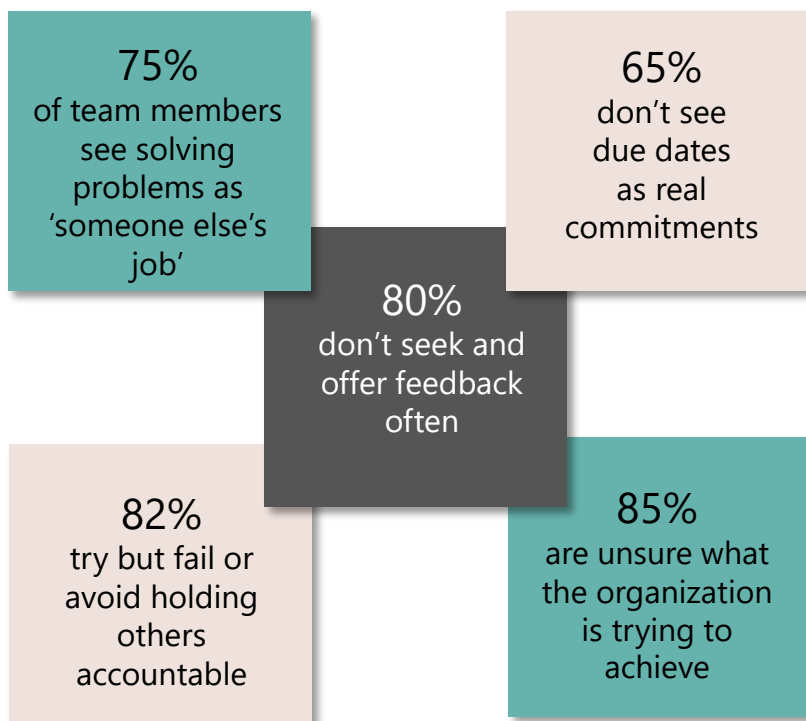
"We just need people to be more accountable."

It's a phrase I often hear from the leaders I work with.

Have you said or thought it recently?

The problem is, when leaders say this, their people hear 'you're not doing enough' or 'you're letting me down'. And that's because accountability is what's discussed when things are going wrong rather than setting things up for success from the start. It's this punitive view of Accountability that holds leaders, teams and organizations back from boosting progress and performance.

And this is a real problem, because research* suggests that when organizations get accountability wrong:



The consequence is poor results, failed initiatives, missed targets, low morale and engagement and an environment with more blame than trust.

Things get worse without anyone knowing why or accepting the accountability to do something about it.

Research also shows that team members see the way leaders behave as the single most important influencing factor on accountability in their workplace.

Unfortunately, many leaders are stuck in a neurologically and psychologically outdated set of beliefs that makes asking for accountability whilst navigating uncertainty harder than it needs to be.

The result is that leaders are struggling to step up to The Accountability Imperative.

These are some of the issues that I see leaders are grappling with:

Accountability conversations are hard - and even harder when they're virtual.

Workers' priorities and expectations of work and life have changed and what was ok before, is less ok now.

Returning to the workplace holds genuine fear of exposure for some people. How do leaders navigate that sensitively?

A distributed workforce feels harder to manage – more time, effort and energy required

The impact of COVID on the wellbeing of workers means leaders feel less able to ask for 'more'.

It's harder to engage people in a virtual environment and to get a read their mindsets, attitudes and behaviours.

Accountability Issues

In my own leadership experience and in working with my clients, I see three main issues with accountability:

1. Confusion

One of the biggest challenges with accountability is that it means different things to different people, often in the same organization and even in the same team.

How consistent is the understanding of accountability in your organization?

2. Concern

Accountability is often only asked for once things have gone wrong - the conversation comes too late, people are defensive, and it can feel hard to do them well.

How confident do you feel having accountability conversations?

3. Context

Leaders are unsure how to embed accountability into the culture of their teams and the organization so that it becomes a normal part of how work gets done.

Is accountability part of your team culture?

The reality is that studies consistently find that leaders are *the most* significant factor in shaping levels of accountability, progress and performance.

The reality is also that a lack of accountability makes leaders, teams and organisations fragile in the face of uncertainty and disruption.

We need create new mindsets, attitudes and behaviours so that leaders role model and feel confident to coach and create cultures of accountability.

We need an Accountability Reset



Accountability is an act of love.
When I call you to account, I'm saying,
"I see the greatness in you. You can play a bigger game."

Dr Paige Williams

The Accountability Reset

Research suggests that accountability is fueled by two factors and as I work with leaders across business, education, government and not-for-profit organisations, I see the same.

They are:

1. The quality of Accountability Relationships
2. The clarity of Accountability Expectations

QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS: From Barren to Fruitful

Barren accountability relationships are based in fear and so lack trust and safety. As a result, people 'muddle through' rather than ask for help, hide mistakes and defend under-performance.

The result is drama, stress and a lack of learning, progress and performance.

Fruitful accountability relationships

have high levels of trust and psychological safety. People feel able to ask for help and support when needed and communicate clearly, regularly and honestly about their progress.

Growth, development and progress are made, and good outcomes follow.

CLARITY OF EXPECTATIONS: From Confused to Clear

When accountability expectations are confused, any one or more of the why, how, what, who, when and so what factors may be unclear. Whilst confusion in any one factor will have a slightly different impact, the overall effect is the same – more stress, drama and waste, and less progress, engagement and performance.

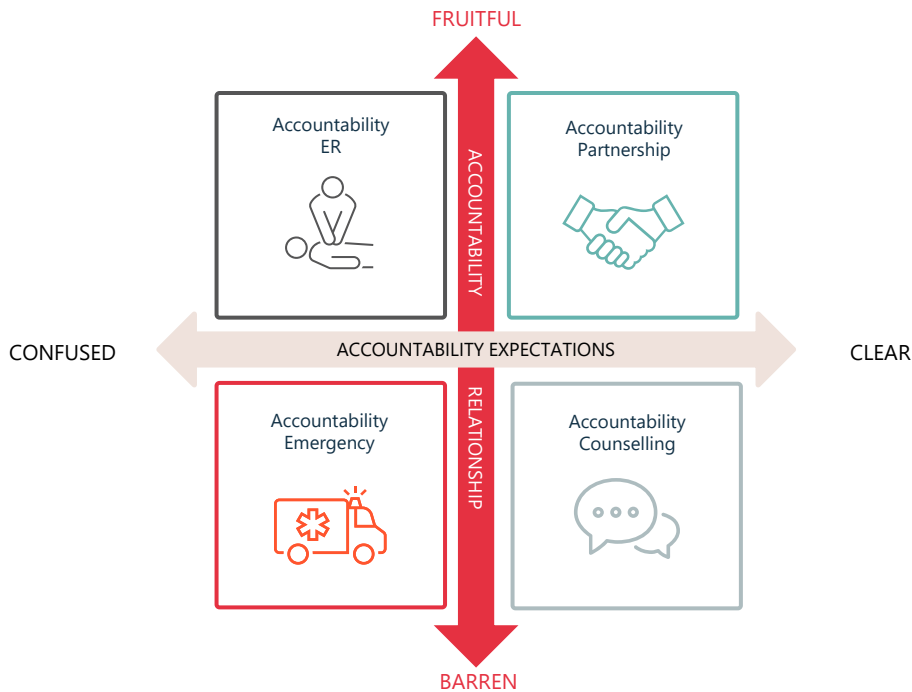
When accountability expectations are clear, people understand why they are doing the work and how it

fits into a 'bigger picture'; what exactly needs to be done and by whom; when it needs to be done by and what the consequences are if it isn't – for them and the wider context. They also need to know what the progress markers are and how these will be reported and reviewed. This level of clarity provides a sense of safety and control which means people feel confident in what they are being asked to deliver.

We reset accountability through
the quality of accountability relationships and
the clarity of accountability expectations

Diagnosing Accountability Issues

Understanding how the two fuel factors for accountability interact can help us diagnose the cause of accountability issues and recognize how we might address them.



ACCOUNTABILITY EMERGENCY

Accountability expectations are confused, and the barren relationship means there is little possibility that people will reach out for the help or support that could improve the situation. The focus is inwards, on staying safe and playing small.

This is a black hole for accountability and a pit for progress and performance that requires swift and significant action.



ACCOUNTABILITY ER

Accountability expectations are confused but the relationship may be quite fruitful. Clarity could be increased through the right conversations, however, there is a risk of returning to an Accountability Emergency if the confusion goes on for too long and causes frustration that impacts the quality of relationship.

There is likely to be limited progress and under-performance here, but – like a patient in the ER - it can be saved given the right treatment.



ACCOUNTABILITY COUNSELLING

Accountability expectations are clear, but the relationship is barren. There is a fragility to this situation that may be tested when problems arise. Things rarely go according to plan, and this is when the quality of the accountability relationship makes a difference through the trust and psychological safety that support honest conversations about issues before they develop and enable collective problem solving to resolve them.

There is performance and progress potential here if the relationship can be nurtured and developed.



ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNERSHIP

Accountability relationships are fruitful and expectations are clear. This is a true Accountability Partnership. People can question expectations, ask for support to fulfill them if needed and feel confident in flagging issues as they arise. Reviews and progress check-ins are agreed, regular and transparent, and people take personal ownership for their accountability expectations. The focus is outwards, with a mindset of contribution and an understanding that 'what I do matters to the progress that we make together'. This is where peak progress and performance lives.

The Accountability Matrix can help us identify the cause of our current accountability challenges and recognize the action we can take to support peak performance and progress.

What insight does the Accountability Matrix provide for you?

Accountability is not just a question of nature or nurture.
Accountability is a mindset that can be developed.

Cy Wakeman



Leading The Accountability Reset

A lack of accountability is holding leaders, teams and organisations back. It's limiting progress and fueling underperformance and it's making us fragile as we navigate the uncertainty and disruption of a COVID-impacted world of work.

Leaders who lead The Accountability Reset understand that it will strengthen relationships, encourage learning, and support purposeful progress and high performance. They move beyond fear and harness the Accountability Imperative to develop fruitful relationships based on confidence, trust and safety. They create clear expectations that enable people take meaningful and effective action to benefit themselves, their team and their workplace.

Are you ready?

The good news is that resetting accountability doesn't have to be difficult, expensive or time-consuming. Small shifts in mindsets, attitudes and leader practices can have a big impact on levels of accountability, progress and performance.

Which is why my evidence-based Accountability Reset Toolkit focuses on actions that leaders can easily integrate into their existing practices to build accountability for themselves, their team members and beyond, and build their confidence to lead The Accountability Reset.

If you'd like to talk about how I can help you, your leaders or your organization have an Accountability Reset, [simply click here to book a time for us to talk.](#)

What my clients are saying...

Paige worked with my executive team on resetting accountability to build on work that we had already completed in defining a set of functional and behavioural accountabilities for each executive and myself. Paige gave us a framework for thinking through the meaning of accountability, focusing on how we individually accept and enact accountability and especially how we may coach others to do the same.

The framework is logical and practical. The workshop was engaging, and I especially enjoyed the energy, humour and self-reflection that Paige brought to the discussions.

Since then, Paige has taken the entire GMHBA management team through the same experience. I have heard from many participants how much they enjoyed the sessions and how they have already begun to apply what they have learned. Personally, I have used the framework in a one-on-one discussions with each of my executive team and can say that the conversation in every case was productive and generated new insights.

I have no hesitation in recommending Paige to any CEO looking to work on shaping accountability that goes well beyond gaining clarity of the 'what' and wishes to deeply explore and see action on the 'why' and 'how'.

Mark Valena, CEO, GMHBA

Every conversation with Paige is a unique learning opportunity. Her curious, insightful mind allows you to share and create aspirations that you hadn't yet dared speak out loud.

Karen Milkins-Hendry, Dean,
The Development Centre,
Independent Schools Victoria

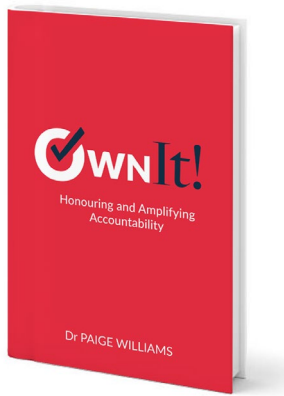
Feedback from our staff about the work Paige does is always positive; she is engaging, funny and translates complex ideas into language that everyone can understand.

Mara MacDonald,
Learning and Development Manager,
Adroit Insurance and Risk

The work that Paige did with my team shifted their mindset and approach to leadership which resulted in them showing up in a very different way with their teams. I noticed that they were more able to have the right conversations at the right time, which meant that issues were dealt with more easily and they looked for ways to connect with people and acknowledge their efforts and contribution. The improvement in energy and engagement as a result was tangible.

Tracey Wagner, Supply Chain Director, Swisse Wellness

Want more?



Own It!: Honouring and Amplifying Accountability

There's an epidemic of underperformance plaguing teams and organisations.

Activity but no progress, meetings with no follow up, confused responsibilities, impossible demands, missed milestones, low morale, poor engagement, talent drain...

What's the cause?

Issues with accountability.

From broken promises and unrealistic expectations to finger pointing and cultures of avoidance and blame, issues with accountability – and the fear that drives them – are rampant across business, government and NGOs.

If you have people in your team you have issues with accountability.

[Click here to order your copy](#)



Keynote Speaking... Done Different

You need an effective way to energise and motivate your team members, a way to share key ideas that you need understood across the organisation so that your leaders can leverage and build on them with their teams.

My virtual and in-person keynotes are a powerful blend of education and entertainment that leave people feeling energized, engaged and clear on the action they can take to feel well, do well and perform well - even as they navigate disruption.

We can develop a Keynote agenda to meet your specific goals, but the topics here are what my clients are finding is helping their leaders and teams shift their perspective and get clear and motivated on the action they can take to make a difference in their own lives and beyond.

[Click here to find out more.](#)



Research, Ideas and Resources

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connect@drpaige.au

drpaige.au

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