SALES GEEK LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

COMPANION PLAYBOOK — EPISODE 19

Accountability Culture

Designing accountability so it does not depend on you

FOR	USE	TIME TO COMPLETE
Sales leaders and owners	**Diagnosing and rebuilding standards**	**Two hours, then ongoing**

WHAT THIS PLAYBOOK IS FOR

Almost every business asks for more accountability. Very few design it, so what they get instead is a leader who chases. Chasing runs on one person's memory, it takes responsibility off the person who should hold it, and it stops the moment that leader takes a week off. This playbook treats accountability as a system with three components, shows you which one is missing in your business, and gives you a sequence for fixing it that will not frighten the wrong people.

HOW TO USE IT

- Part One is the diagnosis. Score it honestly — an inflated score here wastes the rest.
- Part Two tests how clear your standards really are.
- Part Three is the consequence grid, which is where most accountability work actually fails.
- Part Four is the order to make changes in.
- It works standalone. No podcast listening required.

PART ONE

The accountability equation

Accountability is what happens when somebody knows exactly what is expected, everyone can see whether it happened, and something predictable follows either way. Three components. They multiply rather than add, so a zero in any one of them makes the total zero regardless of how strong the other two are.

FRAMEWORK

Clarity × Visibility × Consequence

Score each one out of ten for your team, today

COMPONENT	THE QUESTION IT ANSWERS	WHAT ZERO LOOKS LIKE
Clarity	Does this person know precisely what is expected, in a form you would both describe the same way?	"More proactive." "Better pipeline hygiene." Nobody can miss a target that was never defined.

COMPONENT	THE QUESTION IT ANSWERS	WHAT ZERO LOOKS LIKE
Visibility	Can both of you see whether it happened, without anyone having to ask?	You find out by chasing, which makes you the reporting system.
Consequence	Does something predictable follow — in both directions?	Nothing happens when it is met. Nothing happens when it is missed. So it was never a standard.

Score it

- ▢ Clarity, out of ten: ________
- ▢ Visibility, out of ten: ________
- ▢ Consequence, out of ten: ________
- ▢ Multiply the three together. That is your accountability score out of a thousand.

Most leaders who do this honestly land somewhere around eight, six and two. That comes to 96 out of 1,000. It also explains why rewriting the KPIs for a fourth time changes nothing: improving clarity from eight to nine while consequence sits at two moves the score by twelve points.

A warning about visibility

Visibility means both of you can see it. A dashboard only you look at is not visibility, it is monitoring, and the person being monitored can tell the difference straight away.

PART TWO

How clear are your standards, really

Most businesses believe their standards are clear. Very few are as far up this ladder as they think. Work out which rung each of your key standards is on — be strict, and use the test in the right-hand column rather than your own impression.

FRAMEWORK

The Standards Ladder

Five rungs. Most businesses stop at two and believe they are at five.

RUNG	WHAT IT MEANS	HONEST TEST
1. Assumed	Everybody obviously knows. Nobody has actually said it.	Ask three people to write it down separately. Compare what comes back.
2. Stated	You have said it, probably more than once.	Said is not agreed. Being told is not the same as signing up.
3. Agreed	They have said back, in their own words, what they are committing to.	Can they state it now, without prompting? If not, you are on rung two.
4. Visible	Both parties can see performance against it without asking.	If you have to ask, you are the reporting system.
5. Enforced	Something predictable follows, every time, in both directions.	Has it been enforced with your best performer? That is the real test.

The rung two problem

Most damage happens between stated and agreed. I said it, so they know it, so they have agreed to it — three assumptions stacked up, each one a coin toss. The fix is one question at the end of any conversation where you set an expectation:

“Just so I know we are on the same page, what are you taking away from this?”

Do not use “does that make sense”. Everyone says yes to that. It is a social reflex and it tells you nothing.

The exemption test

Write down the name of the person on your team who is quietly exempt from a standard because they deliver. Most teams have one. Everyone on that team already knows who it is. A standard with an exemption is not a standard — it is a price, and the team has worked out the rate.

PART THREE

The consequence grid

Consequence is where accountability work usually fails, and the reason is that most people hear the word and think only of the negative kind. A consequence is simply something that follows, and it runs both ways. Two dials, four cultures. Find yours.

DIAGNOSTIC

The Consequence Grid

What follows a hit, and what follows a miss

	WEAK POSITIVE CONSEQUENCE	STRONG POSITIVE CONSEQUENCE
Strong negative consequence	**FEAR** Compliance and nothing more. Bad news does not travel upward, so problems reach you late.	**ACCOUNTABILITY** Standards hold and meeting them is worth something. Problems surface early because it is safe to raise them.
Weak negative consequence	**DRIFT** Nothing follows either way. The most common quadrant and the hardest to spot, because nothing looks wrong.	**THE CLUB** Warm and well liked, standards optional. Your strongest people leave first and rarely say why.

Reading your quadrant

- Drift is the default. There is no conflict in it, everybody is pleasant, and the number is always slightly short. It is hard to see precisely because nothing appears to be going wrong.
- Fear usually gets created deliberately after a bad quarter. It produces compliance for a while and costs you early warning permanently — you hear about the stuck deal in week nine instead of week two.
- The Club is pleasant enough that nobody raises it. The cost shows up in who resigns, and they almost never give the real reason on the way out.
- What separates Fear from Accountability is not the negative dial — that is strong in both. It is whether anything good happens when the job gets done properly.

Building the positive dial

This is the cheapest work available to a sales leader and it is almost universally skipped. It does not mean money. It means something specific and public happening when a standard is met.

- Named in the weekly meeting, for a specific thing, not a general “good month”.
- Recognition that is precise enough to be repeatable — tell them what they did, not that they are great.
- Access rather than reward: first pick of a new account, a seat in a bid they would not normally be in, time with you on something they want to learn.

- Consistency over scale. Something small every week beats something large once a quarter.

PART FOUR

The order to change things in

If you have diagnosed Drift, do not go in on Monday and enforce everything at once. The people who react first to a crackdown are your most conscientious ones, and they will assume it is aimed at them. Sequence it.

SEQUENCE

Four moves, in this order

Roughly one a fortnight

ORDER	MOVE	WHY THIS ORDER
First	Pick one standard that matters most. Only one. Make it visible to the whole team.	Visibility is the cheapest component to fix and it changes behaviour before you touch consequences.
Second	Turn up the positive dial on that standard. Something specific and public every time it is met.	Fast, safe, and it establishes that you are paying attention before anything tightens.
Third	Enforce the standard consistently — including with the person you have been exempting.	This single act does more for the credibility of every standard you hold than a year of announcements.
Fourth	Add the second standard. Repeat.	One at a time. Six standards introduced together get treated as an initiative and outlived.

What to expect

- A quiet fortnight before anything visibly changes. This is normal — people are waiting to see whether you mean it.
- The first missed standard is the real test. What you do about that one sets the value of everything you said.
- One person will test the exemption question directly. Answer it plainly and in the same terms you would use with anyone else.

When it is genuinely a person problem

Sometimes the system is sound and the individual still is not performing. That is a different piece of work with its own structure — a skill and will diagnostic, a defined improvement period, and a clear decision at the end of it. Do the system work first. Done properly, it means far fewer of those conversations, and the ones you do have are much cleaner because the standard was never in doubt.

CLOSE

Your next seven days

- ☐ Score your team out of ten on clarity, visibility and consequence. Multiply. Find your zero.
- ☐ Place each of your key standards on the five-rung ladder, using the tests rather than your impression.
- ☐ Ask one person this week to say an expectation back to you in their own words.
- ☐ Write down which quadrant of the consequence grid your team is in, and why.
- ☐ Name the person who is quietly exempt from a standard. Decide what you are going to do about it.
- ☐ Pick the one standard that matters most and make it visible to the whole team.
- ☐ Recognise one specific thing, by name, in your next team meeting.

The three playbooks together

This is the third of a set. Onboarding installs the standard a team works to. Rhythm runs it week to week. Accountability keeps it honest. They are built in that order for a reason: you cannot hold people to a standard that was never installed, or to commitments made in a rhythm that was never designed. If accountability is the problem you came here to solve, check the first two are in place before you spend much effort on this one.

This playbook accompanies Episode 19 of The Mastery Podcast with James Denny and extends the Sales Geek Leadership & Management Programme. It is designed to be used standalone — no podcast listening required — and may be shared with clients and prospects by Sales Geek franchisees.

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