

TEAM-BUILDING HANDBOOK

ACCOUNTABILITY STRATEGIES FOR NURSES



Eileen Lavin Dohmann, MBA, BSN, RN, NEA-BC
*Author of **Accountability in Nursing***

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Team-Building Handbook: Accountability Strategies for Nurses is published by HCPro, a division of BLR.

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ISBN: 978-1-55645-713-5

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About the Author

Eileen Lavin Dohmann, MBA, BSN, RN, NEA-BC, is the interim senior vice president and chief nursing officer for Mary Washington Healthcare in Fredericksburg, Virginia. She is responsible for nursing practice and patient care across the two hospital health system. In addition, she oversees clinical research, infection prevention and control, and home health care hospice. Her passion at Mary Washington Healthcare has been enhancing patient care quality and service through accountability, focused management, and leadership development of nursing leaders.

With more than 30 years of experience as a nurse, Dohmann is an advocate for the profession of nursing and nursing practice. Prior to her roles at Mary Washington Healthcare, she served as administrator for several large and small home health agencies and hospices, where she started and led new programs and services.

Dohmann received her BSN from Fairfield University in Fairfield, Connecticut, and her MBA from Averett University, in Danville, Virginia. She holds Nurse Executive-Advanced certification from the American Nurses Association.

She lives with her husband in Centreville, Virginia, and is a proud mom of three young professional adult sons.

Part One

A Foundation for Accountability

This section introduces you to the idea of accountability. In it, you'll find tools to assess your own accountability style, and you'll learn how to recognize accountability in your peers and manager.

You'll use this knowledge as a starting point for practicing accountability in all of your interactions, at work and at home.

Introduction

Let's talk about your style—the way you make things happen and get things done. This handbook will show you how to develop your style so that it engenders accountability. We'll talk about using accountability tools to make your personal interactions with your manager, colleagues, and patients more productive.

Style is something that's personal to you, but you probably don't think about it often. For example, if you're like most people, when you walk into a meeting you fall into a rote behavior, a form of autopilot. Your autopilot behavior may differ depending on your expectations of the meeting and who is running it. Regardless, operating on autopilot means that you aren't actively engaged.

To become accountable, you need to learn skills to turn off autopilot and become self-conscious about your style as a team member and as a nurse. By taking your own accountability pulse, you will take the first step to understanding and improving your accountability.

How to Use This Book

This handbook will be part of your journey toward developing a powerful and accountable style. Here are the stops we'll make along the way:

In **Chapter 1, *Personal Accountability***, we'll take a look at exchanges in a typical team meeting to see if you recognize yourself in any of the participants. We'll look for clues to behavior and words that support accountability and those that undermine it. We'll review a few questions you can ask to make sure you understand expectations when attending a meeting, so that when you make a commitment you will be able to fulfill it.

Your **Six Accountability Tools** appear in part two of this book, in Chapters 2 through 7. The simple communication techniques presented in these chapters will lay the foundation for building accountability—your own and that of your peers.

In **Chapter 2, *Framing***, we will look at how to set the tone and context for commitment using a straightforward and thoughtful presentation.

Chapter 3, *Effective Questions*, provides you with skills to engage others using specific language that frames your requests in a way that invites productive responses rather than critical, defensive responses.

In **Chapter 4, *Using Active Listening***, we'll learn techniques for clarifying meaning so that you can be sure that you understand the request or expectation and can make a valid commitment.

Chapter 5, *Making Requests and Offers*, presents a close look at the simple power of being clear in your requests by using specific language for framing.

Chapter 6, *Listening for the Yes or the No*, further refines your ability to “hear” whether your request has been understood (or not), and to validate commitment to it.

In **Chapter 7, *Using the Power of Acknowledgment***, you will learn how to provide positive reinforcement to those making and keeping commitments.

Chapter 1

Personal Accountability

I've worked with many people who tell me they're accountable for something, when they really mean that they're *responsible* for it. Time and time again, they don't meet expectations or deliver on commitments they've made. Their intentions are good, but their performance isn't acceptable. They don't practice personal accountability.

Compounding the situation, their explanations for not meeting expectations are usually filled with excuses and blame—neither of which has a place in an accountability culture.

NOTE: Personal accountability doesn't mean that you must do everything on your own. You may have to engage others to help you keep your commitments. You may find depending on others to be the most challenging part of accountability, but at times, you will need help to be truly accountable.

Accountability is about making and keeping commitments, and it starts with you. To demonstrate that you're accountable, you need to ask yourself what it takes for you to make a commitment.

Let's assess your ability to be accountable.

Taking Your Accountability Pulse

Do you practice accountability? Do you do what you say you'll do? Do others believe they can count on you? It's unrealistic to expect accountability of others if you don't expect it of yourself.

Accountability exists in all facets of your life, and in every relationship. Practicing accountability affects all the relationships in your life. It's about expectations and commitments, but if you don't understand what's expected of you, you won't be successful in meeting commitments, even though you may work very hard to be accountable. You have to start by clearly understanding what the other person expects.

Look at the following scenario to see if you identify with any of the nurses and can identify who is practicing accountability.



Scenario 1: Patient satisfaction meeting

Nurse 1 (Tammy): Cathy asked me to chair this meeting because she knows I am very interested in patient satisfaction scores. As you all know, our unit's scores have been dropping over the past few months, so Cathy suggested I get this group together. Patient satisfaction is everyone's responsibility, so I thought we could discuss some ways we can improve our scores.

Nurse 2 (Lisa): I know unit 9G has started doing hourly rounding and their scores have gone up.

Nurse 1 (Tammy): That's a great suggestion. I read a journal article last week that discussed the benefits of hourly rounding. It said patients know their nurses will be in to check on them regularly, so they use their call buttons less and feel more looked after.

Nurse 3 (Mike): I'm willing to try and see if I can fit that into my shift.

Nurse 1 (Tammy): Great! I'll look for that article tonight and write out a cheat sheet we can use for what to cover for hourly rounding. I'll give a copy to everyone tomorrow.

This exchange sounds like the group has decided on a strategy to improve their scores. But can you guess what happens? Two months later, the patient satisfaction scores still haven't improved.



Scenario 2: Follow-up meeting a month later

Nurse 1 (Tammy): Hi Cathy, I heard you wanted to speak with me.

Nurse manager (Cathy): Yes, Tammy, I need to have a quick word about our patient satisfaction scores. They're not getting worse, but I've not seen the improvements I expected. How is your patient satisfaction committee going? You told me last month that you had all agreed on a program that was going to make a huge difference.

Nurse 1 (Tammy): We did. We were going to start hourly rounding, but no one seems to stick to it but me. They keep telling me they start out meaning to round each hour, but then their days get busy and they don't have time.

Looking back at the first exchange now that you've read the follow-up meeting, you probably aren't surprised by the outcome: Most likely you picked up on the subtle verbal cues that telegraph that these nurses didn't truly commit to the new plan and Tammy didn't hold them accountable. So if you guessed that none of these nurses were practicing accountability, you were correct!

Where they went wrong

We've all been in meetings where everyone nodded and appeared to agree to something, but a few months later, nothing had changed. Why? Because *all they've agreed on is that they've come up with a good idea*. But agreeing it's a good idea is just the first step, and it doesn't guarantee results.

The second essential step is to make *a commitment to implement the new idea*—this is the step that moves you toward true

accountability. A commitment must be definable, measurable, and time limited, as in “I will deliver something that can be measured and it will be delivered by a specific date or time.”

The third essential step is to *define how the commitment will be monitored*. How will we know that what everyone committed to do is actually being done?

If you recognized your role in exchanges similar to the preceding example, whether in a one-on-one conversation or in a group meeting, this awareness will help you down the path to improved accountability. If you already have experience with practicing accountability, you’ll have opportunities to build a more powerful and accountable style as you work through this handbook.

Look at the following box to consider one way you can take an accountable role when you participate in your next meeting.

Prepare to Be Accountable in Meetings

When you’re invited to a meeting, prepare for how you should “be” in the meeting. If the organizer hasn’t clearly communicated expectations in the meeting invitation, ask him or her these questions prior to the meeting, or early in the meeting:

1. What is the purpose of the meeting?
2. What role do I play in the meeting?
3. What work will be done?
 - Information sharing/update?
 - Problem solving?
 - Strategic thinking?
4. What is the anticipated outcome of the meeting?

Having this understanding in place early in the process will support an effective and accountable meeting exchange.

Let’s move on to the next few chapters, where you’ll get some practice with six tools you need to develop your personal accountability and to encourage accountability in your peers.

Your Six Accountability Tools

This section presents six tools for having productive interactions with your peers and manager, individually as well as in group meetings. The tools provide an accountability language for you to learn—a new way of speaking.

The words we use can either dampen accountability or trigger accountability. The next time you encounter a situation where you want to build accountability, try using language that produces accountability.

These six communication tools can be used to build accountability—in yourself and your peer group:

1. **Framing:** Set the tone and context for the commitment
2. **Effective questions:** Turn on the creative power of the participants
3. **Active listening:** Make sure people are being heard and understood

4. **Requests and offers:** Generate commitments
5. **Hearing yes/no:** Verify accountability
6. **Acknowledgment:** Celebrate behavior that works

These words create the necessary conditions for accountability. Each one creates a positive dynamic that makes it easy for accountability to happen. Let's look at how each is used.

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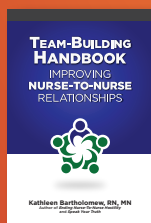
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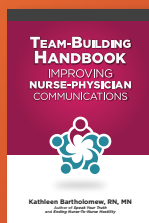
Team-Building Handbook: Accountability Strategies for Nurses gives staff members the strategies and framework they need to practice accountability, holding themselves up to the expectations for nursing behavior and standards of professional practice. This concise, easy-to-read handbook comes in packs of 10 that can be distributed to all staff members.

Team-Building Handbook: Accountability Strategies for Nurses offers nurse managers an indispensable tool to be used to build an environment where accountability is expected and welcomed. Encouraging nursing staff to accept accountability changes a unit where nurses identify problems and complain about them to a culture where nurses are accountable for finding solutions and taking responsibility for their own environment.

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ISBN-13: 978-1-55645-713-5



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