

Create accountability

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If you absolutely, no-matter-what had to get something finished by the end of the week, who could you call on to help make sure you got it done? Even if it's a task you needed to do by yourself, a friend or colleague may be able to help with accountability. For many people, creating outer accountability is key to following through.

Knowing I had historically procrastinated on my taxes, a few years ago in late January when I was scheduling lunch with a friend for February 15, I asked her to check in on my progress with our taxes during our lunch date. She put a reminder in her phone, and when she asked me about the status of my taxes on the 15th, I gleefully told her I was already finished. How did I get them done so quickly? I remembered she was going to ask me about them, and I wanted to have good news to report. Even though the fact that I was going to be getting a refund - which we needed - wasn't enough to motivate me, the fact that a friend was going to ask me about it was. Accountability can help us do the right things for the "wrong" reasons.

Earlier this year a co-worker of mine was experiencing post-surgery-and-physical-therapy pain which led to noticeable limping. One day, concerned, I asked her if she had called the doctor yet. She went home and called that day. Her husband, parents and friends had been encouraging her for a few weeks to call the doctor, but for some reason knowing I would ask her if she had followed through was enough to motivate her to do so. For some of us, it's actually easier to disappoint a family member than a colleague. And family members might be more likely to let us off the hook if we don't follow through. Choose your accountability partners wisely.

I have a tendency to procrastinate on some projects, so I build in accountability by going on record about when I will have those projects finished. During a meeting last Tuesday I told the four people in attendance that I would have an email out to everyone in the company "no later than tomorrow morning." Sure enough, at 11:57 AM on Tuesday I was putting the finishing touches on it. Without telling them when I would send the email, it probably still wouldn't be written. For a lot of us, accountability works better when we don't want to let others down.

Years and years ago (during the second Bush administration), I created accountability. I made a rule for the month of May: "Feet on the floor by 5:15 or I give \$5 to the Republican party." Telling others about this rule made me stick to it; so did pre-addressing the envelope to an organization I had no interest in supporting. And sure enough, I upheld my commitment to get up on time for the entire month I committed to doing it. Sometimes you need to build in drastic accountability measures to keep you on track. (Okay, I'm not sure \$5 is drastic, but the act of sending the donation felt significant enough that I wanted to avoid it.)

Yesterday I was on the phone with a client who said she was trying to use her vacation time in these last few weeks of December because she hadn't taken a vacation all year. I half-joked that I could email her several times a week starting in January to remind her to schedule her vacations for 2018. We laughed and then she said, "Well, I'd be grateful because then I would actually schedule vacation." All of a sudden it wasn't a joke; it was an offer of accountability that she accepted. So I marked my calendar for early January to send her a first friendly reminder. Accountability doesn't have to come in a big fancy package; opportunities for accountability are everywhere.

Create accountability to accomplish your goals both big and small. And offer accountability to others when you can. Together we can achieve more.