

Bonus Worksheet!

ACCOUNTABILITY

Do or do not. There is no `try.'

-Yoda

John

John was a software engineer who wanted to start a non-profit to bring technology to underdeveloped countries. He quit his stable corporate job to start the program. The first few months, he experimented: brainstorming ideas, researching the facts, and designing the website. When he called me to meet for coffee, he was passionate and enthusiastic. After describing everything he'd been up to, though, he confessed:

"There's only one problem!" He leaned in conspiratorially over his coffee. "I'm not making any money!"

John was so excited about his vision that it was easy for him to lose sight of the one most important thing he needed to be doing: raising capital. John seemed fairly lighthearted, but his program was in dire straits. Without the money, there could be no mission.

John committed to making "Raising Capital" his number one focus area. We wrote it in big letters on a napkin and set about establishing some accountability.

As one of my clients recently teased, "What do you recommend for someone who keeps losing her action plan?" The answer: accountability.

"Accountability" means "to give an account," to report back. To stay motivated, it helps to take regular account of what you've achieved so far - important given that "people who regularly record specific daily and weekly results are nearly 50% more likely to make continued progress than those who don't."¹

In the business world, accountability is almost an obsession. Charts, graphs, numbers, metrics, spreadsheets, and scorecards are staples of progress; the work literally revolves around the numbers. Somehow as individuals, we don't manage to keep track of our own progress quite so well. Putting strategies for accountability into place has a powerful effect. What you measure matters.

To keep moving on your action plans, you need a way to hold yourself accountable.

You can do this a number of ways. Below I'll share a few of my favorites. You can find more directions along with forms and worksheets to go with these strategies on the website (www.TheInnerEdge.com). If you find them helpful, you can also download a workbook that will give you directions for over ten other ways of holding yourself accountable so you're not just a great leader but also an astonishing *achiever*.

¹ Robert Cooper, *Get out of Your Own Way* (New York: Crown Business, 2006), 270.

Create a Daily Balance Sheet.

Leaders use all kinds of handy tricks to hold themselves accountable. Checklists. Sticky notes. Pop-ups on their computers. One of my favorites is a Daily Balance Sheet. It looks like this:

Daily Balance Sheet

Date

| | | |
|---------|--------------------------|-------|
| Action: | <input type="checkbox"/> | Done? |
| Action: | <input type="checkbox"/> | Done? |
| Action: | <input type="checkbox"/> | Done? |
| Action: | <input type="checkbox"/> | Done? |
| Action: | <input type="checkbox"/> | Done? |

Total:

You simply list the actions you intend to take for the day and collect hash marks as you do them. At the end of the day, you tally up your score. Do this every day for twenty-one days (long enough to form the habit) and try to increase your score as you go. Easy. Extra steps like this will keep your commitments top of mind.

Accountability Partners

Accountability partners are people with whom you can share commitments and ask for support: a friend, a mentor, a coach. For the humble and receptive leader, asking for this kind of help is a cinch. If like many of us you encounter some internal resistance, however, use the suggested approaches in the box on page X to get the partner you need.

Notice the Impact

Beyond making an *objective assessment* of whether or not an action has been taken, you can also create an *emotional impression* that propels you toward your vision. Psychologist Richard Carson makes the point in his thought-provoking book, *Taming Your Gremlin*: we don't just have to make changes, we have to *notice* the impact.

It works like this.

1. Schedule the action.
2. Take the action.
3. *Notice the impact.*

By "noticing the impact," you raise your awareness as to how the action made you feel. What effect did it have? What results did you get? Was it harder than you thought or easier? Was it worth it? When you notice the rise in your productivity, when you realize the things you put on paper *do* happen, when you see that it is possible to *stop* doing some things and *delegate* others, you will no longer need those deadlines and reminders. You'll just do what you want to do, because you know now that *it works*.

¹ Rick Carsen, *Taming Your Gremlin (Revised Edition): A Surprisingly Simple Method for Getting out of Your Own Way* (Collins, 2003).

How do I find an accountability partner?

Your boss:

"As you know, our sales goals this quarter are very aggressive. I've put together an action plan for meeting them, which is equally aggressive, and I want to hold myself to it. Would you be willing to meet with me every other week to go over the actions I've taken and hear my next steps? It would help me stay motivated and on track."

Your team:

"I'm afraid we have tough hiring decisions to make. Some of you will be switching departments, and many of you will have new reports. I've made an action plan to move through this phase as quickly as possible. I want to share it with you and update you on it weekly so you know what actions I'm taking."

A colleague:

"Listen, I'm trying to make a change. I've been working such long hours. I can't keep it up, but I don't want my work to suffer. I've put together an action plan for making better decisions about how I spend my time. The only thing I need is for someone to hold me accountable. Will you do me a favor, and if you see me here after 6:00 at night, call me on it? If I'm still working late hours, I'll know the plan isn't working."

A spouse or friend:

"You know how I've been grouching about not getting anywhere with my goal to retire by 50? Well, I sat down and made an action plan. Now I just need help sticking to it. Will you check in with me every couple of weeks and ask me how it's going?"

Yourself:

It's 4:00 in the afternoon. The alarm on your PDA beeps.

"Ah, yes. I made that CATA-LIST this morning and haven't thought about it again. Before I go on, let me check that list and be sure I'm doing "catalysts" and "important" steps. Then I'll decide what to do next."

You don't need to hold yourself accountable for *everything*; you'd spend your life keeping score instead of playing the game. Instead, be strategic and use the accountability where it counts - those actions that you know are going to shift your mindset, your energy, and your results. The specific technique you use for accountability is not as important as just *doing* it - finding a way, any way, to make a commitment and measure your success. The main object is to announce, "Here's what I'm doing, here's when I'll do it, and here's how you'll know." Then choose a reliable way to prove you've followed through.

John

When he was building his new nonprofit, John had said he needed a million dollars. He created a hand-drawn bar graph to chart his funds raised and committed to updating it every day. He made the bar green, for cash, and posted it where he (and everyone else) could see it.

John had also agreed to meet with charitable foundations and philanthropists every day until he raised the money. He got a sticky note, wrote "Meetings Completed" at the top, and posted it in his calendar. Every day he gave himself "points" for the number of people he'd contacted and met.

John used me, his coach, as his accountability partner. He asked me to email him once a week for an accounting of dollars and contacts to compare his results to his benchmarks. We did that every week for six months.

Along the way, John noticed the impact of his efforts.

"What I've noticed," he reported, "is that now I never lose focus. Somehow all the things that distracted me before - the brainstorming, the research, the , the website - either became less important or somehow got done along the way. When I stayed focused on my biggest question - how to get the money to fund this operation - the rest of the answers seemed to fall into place. I have made fundraising my mission, and the vision is getting off the ground. Accountability works."

The strategies I've offered to help you take action -

- Stoppportunities
- Delegation
- Accountability

- all address extremely common drags on progress. They remove barriers. They keep you going. They speed results. Are they easy? No - they take practice, time and energy. Most people don't bother. You do. That's why *you* are the one who will know what it's really like to be a better leader and lead a better life.

Exercise

Of all the actions you could take to achieve your vision, where will you find it hardest to follow through? Put a checkmark next to the strategy that will help you get it done.

Keep a Daily Balance Sheet

1. What action(s) do you want to take every day?

2. At the beginning of each day, create a chart and keep track of whether/how often you've taken action.

3. At the end of the day, assess: How did you do? Collect your daily balance sheets every day for twenty-one days.

Find an accountability partner.

1. Who will your accountability partner(s) be?

Name:

Name:

2. What commitment will you make to them?

3. How do you want them to help?

Notice the impact.

1. Name an action you intend to take.

"Every day, the first hour of my schedule was booked for taking action on my goal of doubling my clients. "CLIENTS!" "CLIENTS!" "CLIENTS!" I couldn't get away from it!"
-Mary Anne MacDonald, publicist

2. Take the action.

3. Reflect. What results did you get?

Was it harder than you thought or easier?

Was it worth it?

What will you do next?