



## Three Accountability Credos to Adopt and Live

To enhance accountability adopt these philosophies:

### Credo #1.

**Working with us means you will be asked (like all of us) to be accountable.** This credo includes staff, board members, volunteers and the people you serve. Ask *everyone* to be accountable. Make your organization a place where someone's word equals the task being done. Tips to put this credo into action follow.

### Credo #2.

**We reward those who complete tasks.** Don't underestimate small rewards to reinforce any official gratitude. Approach encouraging successful task completion in a fun way, like offering a prize, the best parking spot or another insider reward. For the next month, create a drawing of donated theater tickets for two. Everyone who arrives early or on time to meetings adds his or her name to a drawing that takes place at month's end. Avoid spending time waiting for latecomers and chasing down unfinished work; instead invest time recognizing early arrivals and task completion.

### Credo #3:

**Everything we do matters.** In late fall, the elk's goal is to eat enough food to survive the winter. Your goal is to change lives. Seek to help people understand how their tasks fit into your organization's activities. (Likewise, continually monitor your efforts to ensure you produce the outcomes your mission requires. If tasks don't help, eliminate them.) Make

no compromises when it comes to fulfilling your mission. The greater your accountability the more lives you will change.

## Nine Action Steps

Since some people believe that "accountability-lite" is woven into the nonprofit sector's skeletal system, your nonprofit can stand out as one where "accountability might" rules. Embrace the following action steps.

### 1. Create Accountability Enhancing Tools.

Year Up, a one-year, intensive training program for urban young adults 18-24, uses a student handbook with a detailed set of expectations that students sign. Would it behoove your organization to create similar written guidelines for your clients? How about volunteers and staff? If yes, start simply with a one-page statement. Expand it as you clarify new expectations.

### 2. Begin With Three Laps Instead of Twenty.

No matter how much you are in shape, the first swim of the season is likely to be an exertion. Your muscles aren't used to moving in the water. So for the first day, you make the goal to start swimming rather than to meet the endurance record you established last fall. Likewise, at the start of any major task, begin with small assignments "to get used to the water." Aristotle reminds us, "Well begun is half done."

When you delegate tasks, help the assignee to identify the initial laps. Offer the same courtesy to yourself.

### 3. Right Size. Encourage people to "bite off only as much



as they can chew at one time." For yourself and others, translate "Call ten people" into "Call two people a night this week for five nights." Unless you face a time crunch, no one writes his or her annual report in one afternoon. You start with sub-tasks, like reviewing your last report and creating an outline of narratives, pictures and the charts needed. Help people to divide tasks into chunks to complete in one sitting.

### 4. Establish Deadlines Before the Deadline.

Your board meeting is on Tuesday evening. Make it a "rule" that all meeting preparations are completed before you leave on Friday—rather than on Tuesday afternoon. While unforeseen events will continue to create chaos and annihilate plans, establishing early deadlines for routine tasks, even grants, increases your outputs, reduces stress and almost always improves your products.

### 5. Establish Standards, boundaries and other guidelines.

State expectations clearly. For example, I developed the Fifteen-Minute Rule for materials to develop case statements. This rule was created after a staff member checked over 200 files to

create a statistic. The Fifteen Minute Rule states that if I request information which takes more than fifteen minutes to collect, to contact me so we can identify an alternative statistic to use.

**6. Flex with Reality.**

Having just advised setting standards, I now advise you to use them with flexibility. By their nature, things take longer and are more complex than we prefer. Holidays and vacations frequently intervene. If you need County Commission sign-off on an item, you must have the item to county staff two weeks in advance. Balance standards with appropriate flexibility, to accommodate reality.

**7. Take Time to Organize.**

The busier you are, the more you need organization. David McCoy, Pastor at River's Edge Community Church shared, "I used to be uninterested in organization, but I realized that I could get more done when I was organized." Being organized isn't a genetic gift that either you possess or don't; it is skill based. If you pursue it, you will improve over time. For help organizing, see David Allen's books including *Getting Things Done* and *Making it All Work*.

**8. What Gets Measured Gets Done.**

Last year, my child brought home an 85 in Spanish complaining about the class' difficulty. Each night, his father began asking about it. Within two weeks, the child reported that his average was almost 100. The teacher had always offered bonus points for class participation. Until the nightly inquisition began, the child hadn't been motivated to collect them. When your organization faces challenges getting a task done, consider how to measure even micro improvements. Simple tools, like asking about the task at staff meetings improve performance. A sign-in sheet ostensibly for safety and data gathering, also creates peer affirmation and lets people know their involvement is noticed. Accountability measures are musts in all staff, board, volunteer and client evaluations. The key is that you must measure what matters. See Credo 3.

**9. Establish Next Steps, and Check-in Procedures.**

Too many things take weeks to complete because no one specified who would take the next step. When you hear, "Oh, I thought you were going to..." it's a sign that its time to improve your next step procedures by identifying the follow-up process you will use. Assign follow-up to the individual with the most investment in the outcome and if its most important to you—take it on.

Developing accountability in your organization is an ongoing process, one that you can jump-start and move forward with the nine action steps and three credos shared here. Use these big credos and nine actions to generate more of your mission.

done.) It also asks you to list all of the grant promises you made. Hint: Extract all promises, i.e., the number to be served, on the form the day you submit the grant. This will save you from re-reading the request every time you have content question.

**3. Plan Ahead.** A federal program required the race of those served. On the report deadline day, we frantically called 20 title companies to ask them to look at a photocopy of client's driver's licenses collected at closing for a down payment assistance program. The following year, we revised our application form to include this question. For every grant you win, review the reporting requirements and setup systems to collect the required information. Before you sign the contract, review the report. If you will need something you don't collect now, you have at least three options, all of which are best executed in advance. They are to:

- 1) Adjust your intake,
- 2) Negotiate with the donor for an acceptable substitute. (Will you accept zip codes instead of census block tracks?) or
- 3) Pass on the funding.

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## Grant-Link: Improving Accountability

Increase your grant funding success with greater accountability. Submitting your application on time is mandatory. Just as critical, is the timely or even early submittal of grant donor reports. Early and on time submittal will enhance your relationship with your grant donor. Here, are three other strategies.

**1. Mind the Dates.** Assign someone the responsibility to track grant-related dates. Once a month this individual reviews different grant obligations and opportunities. They answer questions like: When can we apply again? What is due? When will we have the information to complete the report, etc.? This person shares this information so that personnel in fiscal, programs and administration learn about pending needs. For help download the [Grant Source Organizing Form](#) on our website.

**2. Create Forms.** You also need an individual grant management form. Use the one found under the [Articles and Resources](#) tab. Besides tracking details about individual requests, this form includes a place to record the times you thanked a donor (what get measured gets

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## Money-tastic! Tip of the Month

### #5 Tell the Story of One

Be specific and concrete in your funding requests. In *Made to Stick*, the author describes an experiment where people receive one of two fundraising letters. The first described a need impacting three million children. The second was about one starving seven-year-old girl in Mali. Which letter received the most funds? You're right. The story about one girl earned more than twice the amount than the letter about the suffering millions.

Need more tips? Purchase your copy of [Grant-tastic!](#) today.



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