

A Stands for ACCOUNTABILITY!

Accountability needs to be on a nurse's A-list of priorities. It keeps trust alive and well in relationships. So, if you are working on a busy medical team that is exactly what you want: trustworthy, accountable relationships. If you are a nurse who wants to model accountability on your team, here are eight things you can do to earn the trust of your teammates.

1. Think before you promise to take on a specific task:

It is best not to operate on automatic when you are asked to take on a project-related responsibility; think about the responsibility, particularly if it involves a lot of time and effort, prior to your response. It is fine to say, "I am not sure, I will get back to you tomorrow"; use the time to think of questions that will help you respond in a thoughtful, honest way.

2. Make promises you are willing and able to keep:

Only agree to take on responsibilities that you are committed to do; if your manager insists that you take on a responsibility, ask questions to get more information; it is best to respond when you can make an informed decision: specific tasks, type of support available, time commitment, etc. This type of interaction with a manager and colleagues may actually help everyone think through the needs of a project in a more complete, realistic manner.

3. Negotiate:

Rather than assume that you have to commit to a request as presented, negotiate with your colleagues regarding what you are able to do and the support you need in order to follow through with your responsibility. Negotiation is the art of the possible!

4. Ongoing communication:

Accountability is best when there is regular communication, including updates about the project and your particular responsibilities. Setting up a system of communication, whether it is a meeting or an email helps accountability become more of a reality.

5. Avoid assumptions:

It is best to avoid assumptions when you are involved in a team effort that involves accountability. At times, you may assume that you are the only one following-through on a responsibility or that another team member should know how you are feeling; those assumptions are just assumptions, not necessarily the reality. If you find yourself making assumptions, stop and ask questions to find out precisely what really is happening.

6. Agreements:

Make agreements with your colleagues regarding roles and responsibilities. It is easy to have a conversation, about who does what, but it helps insure accountability when there is a written set of agreements so that everyone is on the same page regarding expectations.

7. Breaking an agreement:

Agreements are subject to change, based on the needs of the individual and the team. As a team member, if you are not able to follow-through with your stated agreement, communicate this to your manager and others on your team. Even though you may be concerned that others will be upset with you about your lack of follow-through, it is still preferable to keep communication on the front burner; you have a better chance of repairing relationships when you are honest and forthright in your communication. And, the members of your team may be able to help with some problem solving, in order to keep you involved in a project in a more limited way.

8. Flexibility:

Any project is subject to change; therefore, your responsibility may also be subject to change too. Having a flexible approach will allow you to accept and respond to the change in a way that diminishes anger and frustration and sustains accountability. In addition, if the change requires more than you originally bargained for, your flexibility can guide you to renegotiate a more suitable plan regarding your involvement.

Accountability is not only useful in helping teams complete projects and improve their work environment it is also a wonderful hedge against that creeping old problem of cynicism and stagnation. You have a choice: will it be productive accountability our old tired, cynicism?

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