Accountability
Leadership on campus often revolves around a group of people working together and depending on each other to follow through on their respective tasks and responsibilities. Holding yourself accountable is a challenge in and of itself; however, being part of a leadership team often requires students to hold others accountable too!

As an advisor to a RSO, holding student leaders accountable can sometimes be tricky to navigate. As the advisor, your primary role is to advise because it is, after all, a student organization, not yours. However, sometimes advisors need to guide students through the process and help them create a culture within the RSO where accountability flourishes.

The Story of Four
This is the story of four people named Everybody, Somebody, Nobody, and Anybody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was asked to do it. Everybody was sure Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that because it was Everybody’s job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn’t do it. It ended that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

Find Common Ground
Successful RSOs communicate expectations and responsibilities right off the bat because without expectations, often everyone ends up frustrated and disappointed. No one can assume everyone knows what is supposed to be done, when, and to what quality level. The more clearly expectations and goals are set up front, the less time the group will waste later clarifying - or worse, arguing about - what was really expected. With the officers facilitating, brainstorm together and then come to consensus on the expectations you all have. Put them in writing and make sure everyone has a copy to refer to.

Gain Commitment
Just because everyone in the RSO knows what to do doesn’t mean they will do it. After goals and expectations are set, individuals need to commit to achieving them. People are more likely to do this when they understand two things: how the goals will benefit them personally, and how the goals will help move the RSO forward. Once this connection is made they are more likely to buy into the goals, and actually welcome being held accountable for the results. Organization leaders should ask: “Do I have your commitment?” and “What needs to happen in order for you to commit to this?” You may even want everyone to sign the list of expectations the group agreed upon – almost like a contract that serves as a friendly reminder throughout the year. Watch out for those phrases like “I’ll try”, or “I’ll do my best” and then ask for and listen to people’s concerns.

Measure Progress
The RSO must measure their ongoing performance and gauge whether or not they meet the goals and expectations to which they had previously committed. In order to do this, information is needed, but be careful not to come across as a micromanager while measuring progress. Advisors can help Presidents follow up with other students without doing the work for them. Following up shows that it’s important and you’re there to help remove obstacles. This follow up provides an opportunity to give praise for progress towards a goal and in time, the students can learn to proactively provide progress reports to the group. Remember, goals are only measurable when they are quantified. Measure the results and compare them to the goals to discover the gaps that require further attention.

For a successful RSO, follow these steps:
1. Find Common Ground
2. Gain Commitment
3. Measure Progress
4. Provide Feedback
5. Link to Consequences
6. Evaluate Effectiveness
Provide Feedback

Share the information gathered with the group. Feedback won’t solve problems by itself, but it will open the door for problem-solving discussions and follow-up actions. We need feedback to do a good job and improve in areas where performance is falling short of expectations. Most of the time, giving objective, behavioral feedback is all it takes. Setting expectations followed by quality feedback is the backbone of holding someone accountable for results.

*Note:* True feedback is a gift. To be effective, the feedback you offer must come from a sincere desire on your part to help or support the person, not to merely fix him or her. If you can’t come at it from this perspective, you may fail, no matter what words you choose or methods you use. Intent is more important than technique.

Link to Consequences

If performance consistently is below expectations, then there needs to be consequences. Without consequences, there is no accountability. Do not confuse consequences with punishments. Punishments are those things inflicted on people to make them pay for their shortcomings. They do not contribute to a solution. Consequences, however, will guide and focus behavior and encourage them to take their commitments more seriously.

Tips for Addressing Unmet Expectations

Determine as a group how individuals and the team will respond to unmet expectations. As important as setting up mutual expectations is, it is equally important to come to consensus on how they will be addressed when not met.

**Consider These 5 Simple Steps:**

1. When addressing an individual, find a neutral location where you can speak one on one confidentially.
2. Use “I” statements when sharing your perspective.
3. Refer to the agreed upon expectation(s) that was not met.
4. Determine a plan of action to resolve the unmet expectations or responsibilities, and consequences if an action plan is not completed by the determined timeline.
5. Set people up for success, not failure. Provide them with the tools and information that will help them meet the expectations outlined.

Evaluate Effectiveness

Once the group has committed to the expectations set and have provided constructive feedback and support along the way, it is time to evaluate the group’s results. Look at the quantifiable goals set and determine if you were successful at holding each other accountable for reaching those goals. Also, review how the group handled the process. Find ways to be more effective at applying the principles of accountability.

If your RSO follows this process consistently, you’ll create a culture of accountability and “no excuses” within your organization.

**Conversation Starters**

(Adapted from PaperClip Communications)

Holding people accountable can be really hard, especially when first beginning a conversation. “We need to talk” is probably the worst way to start a conversation because no one likes to hear that! Here are some “conversation starters” to consider for starting a feedback conversation with others:

- **Holding someone accountable for not pulling his weight** “Marcus, you are a valued member of this team and we all benefit from your skills and talents when you are fully engaged and committed to our goals...”
- **Holding someone accountable for not meeting a deadline** “Jonah, at our last meeting we collaboratively determined a deadline for your report that you felt you could accomplish...”
- **Criticism of someone causing disruptions** “Ella, I enjoy having you as a part of our organization and I feel when you give your full attention to...”

*RSO-Registered Student Organization

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