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Accountability with Heart:

THE ART OF TOUGH LOVE

There is nothing more precious than the colleague who will hold you to your highest standards of excellence. Traditionally, accountability occurred between the hierarchical authority and the subordinate. Accountability with heart can occur among anyone with heart — and in all directions. It has nothing to do with hierarchy. It is all about excellence and our commitment to one another. It boils down to who in your world loves you enough to never let you settle for mediocrity or being limited by your blind spot!

Tough love, of course, requires deep mutual respect and an open invitation for others to call us to our high-

est standards of excellence. You begin by allowing others to hold you accountable — without reservation or defensiveness. You do this by declaring that you care more about your contribution, professional growth, and the team's success, than your own recognition or appearance of "having it all together." Leadership is a messy job that requires the humility and courage to ask people to contribute to you every time you show up less than your best. When you allow people to offer you their tough love, you open the door to the possibility of returning the favor.

Once you are known for your genuine openness to coaching and being held accountable, you need to focus

on and emphasize other people's virtues, best qualities, positive intentions, and accomplishments. You need to love them for who they are, in spite of how they underperform or disappoint you sometimes. You also need to be totally committed to their success. This requires spending time with them to discover what their highest intentions are and how they define success. It often involves inspiring them to reach for a higher standard than they'd come up with on their own. Your appreciation for who they are allows you to do this effectively.

Tough love also requires putting aside your judgments and upsets when you are speaking to them about excellence and any concerns you have about their performance. The toughness in tough love is not about being hard on people when they fall short of expectations. It is about challenging people to declare the level of excellence they aspire to, and then reminding them of their intentions when it gets tough to achieve them. It's best done with a smile on your face and love in your heart!

Your role in this accountability conversation is to help them discover that they have the strength to look at and address the gap between their own standards of excellence and their performance. No one does this well when they are being criticized or feeling inadequate. Your spoken message is "You're better than this" or "You're ready to take your game to the next level," as opposed to "You're not good enough." Your unspoken message is, "I'm going to love you enough until you discover who you are when you are at your very best." To do this well, you will need to remind people to reflect on their attributes and accomplishments, while owning up to their shortcomings and renewing their commitment to excellence.

In addition to "being" the person we've described above, there are some sequential steps that will help you have an effective conversation that provides accountability with heart. Let's look at a brief overview:

YOUR HIGHEST INTENTION – remind the person of your intention to support them to achieve their best possible performance and most desirable outcomes. Communicate that you come in peace and only want to support their ultimate success.

YOUR OBSERVATION – let the person know what factually occurred without adding your perceptions, opinions, or judgments. "I see you have mustard on your face," is much preferred to "You have unprofessionally bad manners." You can also remind them of what they've previously declared about their intentions and openness to your coaching.

YOUR FEELINGS – you may have some emotions that are relevant and important to share. For example, "I'm feeling frustrated...surprised...disappointed...hesitant...discouraged" or "...hopeful...encouraged...dedicated...enthusiastic...grateful." If you have genuine feelings to share and you disclose them with compassion, it will help solidify the trust between you.

YOUR NEEDS – you certainly need permission to have this conversation now, but you may have other needs related to the person's performance or level of commitment. Spelling out how this person's contribution impacts what you or the team needs to be successful, will deepen the sense of connection and interdependency between you.

YOUR PART OF THE BREAKDOWN OR SOLUTION – every situation that does not realize a commitment to excellence has two sides. If you have contributed to something not going well, and you own up to it, you are allowing the person to focus on their part. Likewise, if you have a role to play in the solution that is needed for excellence, and speak to that, you are offering the support that it's not all up to them.

YOUR REQUEST – ultimately any conversation for accountability ends with a new agreement or a renewed dedication to excellence. Your request is an invitation to the person to declare their renewed commitment.

YOUR APPRECIATION – once the person has declared their next steps toward excellence, you can further solidify your experience of mutual respect with appreciation. It takes a strong person to accept tough love and strive for their highest level of performance. It is an extraordinary opportunity to work with people like this, and it merits that level of recognition.

With the world in its current condition, the sustainability movement has a critical opportunity to provide real leadership. A global healing is needed. Everyone on the planet has to step up to higher and higher levels of excellence. It is not time to avoid tough conversations. And it does not work to be hard on people. Criticism does not heal, love does. And tough love is required to heal our toughest difficulties.



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