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Newsletter

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Encouraging Full Accountability in an SME Business

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Encouraging Full Accountability in an SME Business

Accountability is a critical ingredient in the success of any small or medium-sized enterprise (SME). In businesses where teams are lean and resources are limited, every individual has a direct impact on performance, customer satisfaction, and business growth. Creating a culture of accountability is not about assigning blame when things go wrong; it is about encouraging people to take ownership of their responsibilities and deliver on their commitments.

The foundation of accountability is clarity. Employees need to understand what is expected of them, how their role contributes to business objectives, and how success will be measured. Clear responsibilities, achievable goals, and regular communication help eliminate confusion and ensure everyone is working towards the same outcomes.

Leadership plays a vital role in setting the standard. Managers who take responsibility for their decisions, honour commitments, and openly acknowledge mistakes demonstrate the behaviours they expect from others. Accountability is most effective when it is modelled consistently from the top.

Employees must also be empowered to make decisions within their areas of responsibility. When people are trusted to act, solve problems, and contribute ideas, they are more likely to take ownership of results. Excessive micromanagement can weaken accountability by reducing personal responsibility and initiative.

Regular performance discussions and measurable objectives help maintain focus and provide opportunities to recognise achievements or address concerns. Constructive feedback should focus on learning and improvement rather than blame. When mistakes occur, the emphasis should be on understanding what happened, identifying solutions, and preventing similar issues in the future.

Recognition is equally important. Celebrating individuals who demonstrate ownership, reliability, and initiative reinforces positive behaviours and encourages others to follow their example. At the same time, persistent avoidance of responsibility should be addressed promptly and fairly to maintain standards across the organisation.

Ultimately, accountability becomes sustainable when it is embedded within the company's culture and values. By creating clear expectations, leading by example, empowering employees, and encouraging open communication, SMEs can foster an environment where people take responsibility, work collaboratively, and consistently deliver results.

A culture of accountability strengthens trust, improves performance, and creates a solid foundation for long-term business success.

If you would like more information on Return to Work meetings, please contact Jenny@agilehrconsulting.com

Fair Probationary Periods

With legislation changing around unfair dismissal service requirements in January 2027, it’s important to start developing your probationary review periods and ensure that they are fair, clear and consistent.

Probation periods are a valuable tool for employers. They provide an opportunity to assess whether a new employee has the skills, behaviours and capabilities required for a role, while also allowing the employee to determine whether the organisation is the right fit for them. However, a probation period only delivers value when it is managed fairly and consistently.

Conducting a Fair Probation Period:

1. Set Clear Expectations from Day One

Employees should understand:

- The length of their probation period
- The standards of performance expected
- Key responsibilities of the role
- Any targets or objectives they are expected to achieve
- How and when probation reviews will take place

Managers should avoid relying on vague expectations such as "fitting in" or "showing initiative". Instead, expectations should be specific, measurable and linked to the requirements of the role.

2. Schedule Regular Review Meetings

Don’t just wait until the end of the probation period, regular review meetings help managers:

- Monitor progress
- Recognise good performance
- Provide timely feedback
- Identify support requirements
- Address concerns before they escalate

Employers may hold reviews after one month, two months and shortly before the probation period ends. The frequency should reflect the complexity of the role and the length of the probation period.

3. Provide Constructive and Balanced Feedback

Effective feedback should be:

- Specific rather than general
- Based on observable behaviours and outcomes
- Focused on improvement and development
- Delivered consistently and respectfully

Where concerns exist, employees should understand exactly what the issue is, why it matters and what improvement is expected.

4. Give Employees a Genuine Opportunity to Improve

Support may include:

- Additional training
- Increased supervision
- Clear action plans
- More frequent review meetings
- Access to mentoring or coaching

5. Keep Accurate Records

- Review meeting dates
- Objectives and expectations discussed
- Feedback provided
- Agreed actions and support measures
- Employee comments and responses

6. Consider Reasonable Adjustments

Employers should remain mindful of their obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

If an employee has a disability, reasonable adjustments may be required to remove barriers affecting performance. Employers should also ensure that review processes do not disadvantage individuals because of protected characteristics.

If you would like more information on Probation Periods or Upcoming Legislation Changes, please contact
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Return to Work Meetings

We know that our employees are vital to the success of the business. When absences occur due to illness this can lead to increased workloads for others and areas of the business can be affected. Alongside your absence recording processes, Return to Work meetings play an important role in effective absence management as this is where managers can gain the most valuable insights into employee wellbeing and attendance.

What is a Return to Work Meeting?

This is a discussion between a manager / HR and the employee returning to work after a period of sickness. It is designed to support the employee's return to full working capability through:

- ✓ Ensuring the employee is fit to return to work
- ✓ Discussing the reason(s) for the absence
- ✓ Identifying any support or workplace adjustments required
- ✓ Updating the employee on any key workplace developments
- ✓ Confirming any next steps if necessary

Ensure you document the conversation and any actions required.

Why are Return to Work Meetings Important?

A Return to Work meeting helps employers welcome employees back to work and show support for their wellbeing in addition to confirming their team member is fit to return to work.

Through having a conversation with the employee, managers can understand the reasons for the absence and thus identify any underlying issues affecting attendance and explore if any workplace factors contributed to the absence (eg an employee may be experiencing work-related stress / mental health concerns / work-home conflicts / caring responsibilities). Following this, support measures can be put in place where appropriate. The employer can also share the company's attendance expectations to promote attendance.

Regular Return to Work meetings can help prevent short-term absences from becoming a recurring issue by promoting accountability through an informed and supportive approach.

If you would like more information on Return to Work meetings, please contact Hils@agilehrconsulting.com