Culture of Accountability

Hermann Simon, author of "Hidden Champions," researches companies that dominate their market and seeks to identify what factors determine their organizational success. His research concludes that it's not processes or policies that lead to greatness — it's how employees engage in feedback.

High-performing organizations are comprised of individuals (Sparks!) who engage in feedback freely. In these types of organizations, peers share feedback with peers, individual contributors offer feedback with their managers, and managers provide feedback with employees outside of their team or department. This level of candor inspires a culture of accountability, which is only achievable when individuals have the courage to offer feedback.

As a Spark, use these questions to start a conversation with your colleagues/team about feedback and accountability. You can host this conversation over coffee or lunch. Share with your group that you're reading a book on leadership and you'd like to discuss some of what you're learning. Plan at least 45–60 minutes for the conversation.

1 Can you recall a time in your career when someone gave you a piece of feedback — either positive or constructive — that significantly impacted you and inspired a change? What was it and what were the circumstances?

2 Do you feel that you get enough feedback on your performance right now? What type is it — more positive than constructive (or the other way around)?

3 Do you ever hold back from giving someone feedback? What circumstances usually prevent you from providing someone feedback on their performance?

4 Does our organization fear feedback? Are we afraid to hold people accountable to their performance? Why or why not?

5 What do you think would happen if people engaged more freely in offering people feedback (both positive and constructive)? What would be the short-term impact? Long-term impact?

6 If our team offered feedback more freely, what type of results would we expect to achieve?

7 How could we — as a group/team — be a catalyst for inspiring greater feedback in our organization?