



## TRANSCRIPT

### **Episode # 34: Two Ways To Avoid Unpleasant Surprises**

You are listening to episode 34 of *Mastering The Power Skills*. You know, none of us like that feeling of working on a project only to discover that someone, somewhere dropped the ball. Something was overlooked or it didn't get done, or it didn't get done well. It's an unpleasant surprise and now you have to figure out what happened and how to deal with it.

Now, I can't tell you in this episode how to fix your particular unpleasant surprises, but I can tell you two ways to reduce the risk of them happening to you. Join us in this episode to learn how you can better keep things running smoothly, versus going off the rails.

How much more could you accomplish if you were 25% or even 50% more influential and persuasive? Welcome to *Mastering The Power Skills*, the podcast that provides you with the tips, strategies, and the inspiration to grow your own power and win support for your ideas. And now here's your host, C-suite leadership coach Kathy Dockry.

Hi there, everyone. We've now reached the third and final episode of our three-part series on the magic formula. The formula you can follow to get other people, like your team or your colleagues, or even your boss, to do things smoothly.

In the first part of this series, episode 32, I explained the magic formula you can follow to do this and the benefits you'll get from using that formula consistently. Just as a reminder, the formula is this; clear expectations plus firm accountability equals or produces better results with less friction.

In other words, if you provide clear expectations to people and follow that up with firm accountability, you'll get better and more consistent results with less friction and less drama. The beauty of this magic formula to you is that if you follow it regularly you'll see a great improvement in your work life as a leader.

The things that you ask to get done will be getting done faster and more smoothly. And you won't feel like you have to exert a lot of effort to drag people along with you. A few months into using this formula you'll wake up one morning and you're going to realize that things are humming along with a life of their own and that you have more time to focus on the important stuff versus wondering all the time if people are completing their tasks well.

Now, just because you're using the magic formula doesn't mean that there won't be unanticipated problems from time to time or that you'll occasionally have someone on your team who isn't performing well no matter what you do. But by using the magic formula regularly you greatly reduce the occurrence of avoidable problems and you'll also more quickly spot and solve any problems you have with the weaker members of your team.

In the second episode of our series on the magic formula, episode 33, we drilled down a little on one portion of the formula, the part about setting clear expectations. I gave you a checklist that makes you an expert in setting clear expectations. And I also gave you some suggestions as to how to use it.

So if you haven't listened yet to episodes 32 and 33, I highly recommend that you do so. And be sure to download that checklist for setting clear expectations. You can find the link for that downloadable list in the show notes of this episode. And be sure to use that checklist.

Think of it this way, how much better would things be for you if things were going 50% more smoothly? That would be pretty good, right? If I had a simple formula for doing that, I sure would be following it religiously, and I hope you do too.

Now, today we're going to be talking in a little more detail about the other part of the magic formula, the part about creating firm accountability. You'll learn two very simple ways of ensuring that other people stay on track and don't get derailed.

In other words, holding other people accountable doesn't have to create a lot of drama and bad feelings because creating accountability starts with you. And if you do these two things, you're less likely to encounter unpleasant surprises.

So, first let's look at what lack of accountability looks like. In the intro to this episode I described the things we first think of when we talk about lack of accountability. So imagine you're leading a project and something important gets overlooked or forgotten. Or the project gets delayed or never completed at all. Or it gets done, but it doesn't get done well.

When something goes off the rails and there's a lack of accountability, stuff starts happening. You're going to see some or all of the following behaviors. So one thing you might see is people acting like they aren't responsible for the problem or they aren't responsible for solving it. Or that they never owned that responsibility in the first place.

You're probably going to see a lot of finger pointing in addition. And by that I mean shifting the responsibility to other people or to other situations and

assigning blame to those people or to those events. When there's a lack of accountability, then there's also a certain amount of confusion as to how the problem happened in the first place.

And you might also see backing away from talking about the problem and making other people do that. So this is what I mean. In other words, if the bad news on the project needs to be communicated to others higher up in the organizational chain and explained, you're going to find sometimes that people are unwilling to step up and help you do that.

So as you can see, in an environment where you haven't created accountability, things can get dysfunctional pretty quickly. It's hard to quickly and accurately figure out what happened and why. And sure, you may have your suspicions, but without that clarity that's created by accountability it's hard to take direct and decisive action to prevent things from getting worse, or to lower the risk of problems like this happening again.

And it's also hard to communicate a clear story about what's going on to your boss or to senior management. And, yikes, I think we've all been there, trying to explain an unpleasant surprise to a boss. It's not a comfortable position to be in, especially if you don't have a clear and understandable story.

Now, let's look at the opposite of that. Let's look at what happens in situations where accountability does exist, it has been created. Well, first of all, when accountability has been created there are fewer unpleasant surprises. And that's because everyone on your team has more clarity on your expectations and is owning their personal responsibility for their part of the project.

Also, where accountability has been created, you are less likely to be surprised in the first place. And that's because you have more clarity. You are more likely to see in advance where things might go wrong. And you can act proactively to eliminate those risks and get things back on track.

And finally, when accountability has been created, you are in better shape if the worst happens and things actually do go wrong. Because let's face it, you can't control everything. Of course, the completely unexpected can happen and our goal as leaders shouldn't be to prevent each and every risk. That would be a pretty ineffective goal, and one that would keep us from more valuable activities.

Instead, we want to try to avoid whatever risks that are reasonably preventable. And we want to put ourselves in the position to better handle the unexpected when it does happen. And that's really the beauty of creating accountability. Because when something you didn't expect happens, you want to be able to do a few things really well.

For example, you want to quickly and accurately figure out what went wrong so that you can keep the damage to a minimum. And you want to do that because you don't want things to get worse. Another thing you probably want to do is you want to come up quickly and accurately with a solution, because you want to get things back on track.

Another thing you want to probably do is you want to rethink things like resources, people, and processes. Do you actually have the things in place to do the job and do it well? And you want to be able to communicate clearly with important stakeholders, like your boss, or your colleagues, or even your team. You want to earn their confidence that you know what you're doing, so that you have the support you need to fix things.

So these are all things that you want to do if things go wrong. And when you've created accountability, you've created your ability to do all of the above things. Things are less confusing and more understandable. You can have productive conversations that achieve something versus dysfunctional ones where people don't behave well.

In fact, by creating accountability, you've created the possibility that even if things go wrong, when all is said and done, you end up with more credibility and more trust because other people are just as impressed with how you handle problems as they are with avoiding them in the first place.

So, often, this is the point where some of my clients ask, “What do you mean exactly by creating accountability? Because from where I sit, accountability is what happens after something goes wrong.” In other words, when something goes wrong, we look to assign accountability to people or activities.

And my response to that is, sure, that’s one way we use the word accountability. But is that the most productive way to think about things? Because, again, assigning blame and finger pointing can inadvertently create destructive dynamics. And while it’s vitally important to do the analyses that identify where things went wrong and what actions need to be taken to address that, analysis done after the event, is always going to be something of a mop up job.

So don’t we really want to be proactive? And doesn’t accountability really start long before things go wrong? The answer to that is, obviously, yes, when you think about it. Accountability is a process, it’s not an event. It starts at the very beginning and it lasts all the way through a project or assigned task.

And it’s a process, it starts with you. If you’re the one ultimately responsible for getting something done, then you have to create that process of accountability. In other words, as the saying goes, hope is not a strategy. I



love that phrase. It's so true, and it's kind of what we do a lot. We kind of hope things will get done. But that's not a really great strategic way to approach things.

The strategy you want is to deliberately and intentionally put some firm guard rails up at the very beginning to make it more likely that things don't go off track. And if they do, they don't go off track by much. In other words, the car can be retrieved, it hasn't gone off the cliff completely. In other words, you want to create accountability.

So now we get to the good stuff. How do you create accountability? What can you do from the very beginning to ensure that accountability is baked in and part of every request that you make of someone else to do something? And the answer to that question are two very simple actions.

The first is to get a proper response every time you ask someone to do something. And the second is to have regular check-ins. I mean, what could be simpler and easier to do? But before you shrug your shoulders, let's talk about each because the reality is we almost always don't exert any effort to get a proper response from someone when we ask them to do things.

And while most of us already do informal or even formal check-ins, we often take shortcuts. And we don't check in on the things that will really help us to avoid those unpleasant surprises.

So let's start with number one of these two things you can do, getting a proper response. A proper response is one that you get at the beginning when you're making the request to do something. And it creates clarity. Enough clarity, so that you know what to do next, whether it's to relax and have confidence that the job will be done, or whether it's to negotiate further for additional clarity or resources.

So let me give you a few examples of common responses that we get and how you can turn them around into proper responses. So first, here's the easiest, the other person could agree or accept to do what you've asked. And if that's the case, you need to remember that it's best to get them to acknowledge or confirm the what, the when, the how of what they'll be doing so you can be confident that the two of you are in complete alignment.

But here's another thing that could happen, the other person could decline to do what you're requesting. That's more likely to happen when you're asking a peer to do something, of course, versus a member of your team. And it might seem odd to say that rejecting your request is a proper response, right?

But remember, if you're looking to avoid unpleasant surprises, you need to know upfront whether there's alignment, versus finding out later that you don't have that. And also remember, now that you know where things stand, that the other person doesn't feel that they can do what you've asked, you now have options. You can explore their reasons for declining your request to see if there are ways in which you can change their mind and get them to give you a proper acceptance.

So here's another possibility, the person you're asking to do something might make a counter offer. They might say something like, "I can't do this. But I can do that." For example, they might suggest a different time frame or make a request for additional resources.

And here's where you'll want to consider your own conditions of satisfaction that we talked about in our last episode, and then decide whether the counteroffer is acceptable or you need to negotiate further before you can get to that acceptance, that proper response that you need.

And here's a possibility in terms of a response that happens a lot when you're talking to a peer. It's a promise to reply later to your request. Sounds pretty reasonable, right? And it's pretty common. But if we want to turn this into a proper response, what we want to do is get alignment on timing. On

when exactly that response to your request is going to appear. So you say, “Can we agree you’ll let me know by X date?”

And finally, here’s another common possibility in terms of a response, it’s what I call the non-response. That’s when you get a head nod or a brief okay, or some other type of ambiguous signal. And it kind of looks like agreement, but it doesn’t really show any commitment.

We can often walk away from those encounters thinking that we’re on the same page with the other person, only to find out much later that we really weren’t aligned when things start to go wrong. So when you get a non-response, you need to specifically ask the other person, “Does that mean you’ll do it?” And you also need to get specific acknowledgment of the what, when and how of your request if you want to be confident that you and the other person are aligned.

So, I just threw a lot of examples at you just now of how to turn common responses into proper responses. But don’t worry about remembering them because remember that downloadable checklist that we discussed in our past episode? Well, it also contains a section on proper responses. That way, you’ll always be prepared going into a conversation to steer things towards a proper response. And you’ll see a link to that checklist, so you can download it, in the show notes for this episode.

And remember, it's always worthwhile to steer things towards a proper response because when you have one, you not only have a clear understanding of whether or not you have alignment, you now have a tool that you can use to create clarity later, if things go wrong. You'll be better equipped to pinpoint where and how things went wrong, so that you can do more effective problem solving.

So getting a proper response is one way of reducing unpleasant surprises. Number two, the second way, is the tried and true regular check-ins with the other person on the status of the request that you made.

Now, this is something you probably already commonly do. But the questions you need to ask yourself are whether you're doing it enough and whether you're doing it in the right way. Here are a few tips to help guide you on that. One thing you want to do is consciously and intentionally schedule your check-ins in advance. You should always at least have one check-in scheduled in your calendar at any given time until the request gets done.

Another thing you might want to do is decide how formal or informal the check in needs to be. If it's a big or critical project, you may need to schedule a meeting. If it's a relatively straightforward request, a casual email check-in might do. But give that some thought versus just defaulting to your usual practice because you want to make a conscious and intentional decision as to what's right for this particular situation.

Another thing to be thinking about is make sure you specifically check in on any important aspects of getting the request done successfully, even if you're just doing a casual check-in. For example, if the time frame is important, you can send an email saying something like, "How's the draft board presentation going? Does it look like it's still on track to get done on time?"

Or if relationships with another department are critically important to the overall success of what you've asked to get done, you might send a note saying something like, "How are the negotiations going on the big deal with a new customer? Are you guys happy with how you're working together with Tom and his team?"

In other words, you want to get more specific than just saying, "How are things going?" Because that way you can identify potential risks early before they become big or bigger problems.

Okay, my friends, we've now finished our three-part series on the magic formula for getting other people to do things well for you. We've covered what the formula is and why it will take your leadership performance to a new level. We've also dived into the checklist that will make you an expert in setting clear expectations. And finally, in this episode, we discussed how

you can create an environment of greater accountability by taking two simple actions.

If you're just joining us now, do go back and listen to those first two episodes. And be sure to download the checklists that will help you implement these practices in your own work life. The link to that checklist is in the show notes for this episode, because if you want to become more and more successful in delivering results, then this is an important skill to master. And the checklist will help you do that.

And when you deliver better and better results, guess what? Not only do you earn more and more credibility at work, but you also are perceived as a strong candidate for larger leadership roles. So this power skill of being effective and asking other people to do things is a key aspect of being a strong leader.

So one last thing to share with you, we're changing the topic now. We're now nine months into producing this podcast and we're beginning to get a good feel for the right flow and content. Thanks, by the way, to you, the listeners, for some of your feedback and suggestions along the way. So I wanted to share with you what you can expect for the podcast going forward.

First, we're going to be going back to a weekly format. Some of you may have noticed that for the past few months we've been producing an episode every other week versus weekly. That's because we've been creating some great new leadership programs in other parts of the Significa business and, well, there was just too much going on to produce an episode every week of the podcast.

But I felt bad about that. And I vowed that as soon as I could get back to a weekly format, I would. So you can expect a new episode next week and every week after that.

In addition, we're going to expand the types of episodes we're going to be doing. Up to now the majority of our episodes have been more like lessons, where I've been sharing some very practical tips and techniques on the power skills of influence, persuasion and presence. And don't worry, I'll continue to do those kinds of episodes.

However, mixed in with that will be a new type of episode, which we're calling power thoughts. And these will be short episodes where I share with you something helpful on the mindset necessary to be a powerful leader. The goal is to give you a thought that will help you feel energized, more at ease, and more powerful.



The power thoughts episodes will probably just be 10 minutes long. But these are the types of thoughts that can be transformative for us at the right time in our careers. So there'll be a lot of value to them.

And finally, we didn't have a lot of time in the beginning of this year to interview guest speakers. But we're beginning to line people up right now for the rest of the year. So be sure to keep an eye out for those special episodes, which will probably start up in a month or so.

And what I especially like about those episodes is getting insights and perspective on the power skills from a wide variety of sources. I learn something new every time, and I hope you find our guests as thought provoking as I always do.

Okay, my friends. That's it for today. I hope you're heading into an awesome week ahead, and I'm looking forward to seeing you in our next episode.

Hey there, would you like some personal guidance about how to use the power skills of influence, persuasion, or presence in a particular situation in your workplace? Well, if so, we've got your back. Just send us a note explaining your situation to [powerskills@significagroup.com](mailto:powerskills@significagroup.com). We'll drop that email address in the show notes. We'll feature your inquiry in an upcoming episode, keeping your identity anonymous, of course, and make sure you

have some tips and strategies to help you navigate your particular situation skillfully.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *Mastering The Power Skills*. If you like what was offered in today's show and want more insights and resources from Kathy, check us out at [www.significagroup.com](http://www.significagroup.com).