



accountabili-buddy

— CLARITY. COMMITMENT. FOLLOW THROUGH. —



**REFERENCE
SHEETS**

REFERENCE SHEET 5

RESPONSE MATCHING GUIDE

The quality of an accountability response depends on whether it addresses the problem that is actually present.

A useful intervention applied to the wrong problem is still a poor intervention.

IF THE PROBLEM IS SIMPLE NON-FOLLOW-THROUGH

Consider

- Maintain the commitment
- Recommit
- Observe whether the pattern repeats

Example

“Do you still want the same three this week?”

Avoid

- Unnecessary psychological analysis
- Automatic reduction
- Shame

IF THE PROBLEM IS AVOIDANCE

Consider

- Identify the avoided action
- Distinguish preparation from engagement

- Maintain the meaningful action as the commitment
- Acknowledge expected discomfort without making discomfort an exemption

Example

“The issue seems to be sending, not working on the proposal. Do you want the commitment to be sending it?”

Avoid

- Adding reminders when memory is not the issue
- Endless preparation
- Shrinking away the decisive action

IF THE COMMITMENT IS UNREALISTIC

Consider

- Recalibrate quantity
- Slow the pace
- Map the target onto actual capacity
- Reduce simultaneous commitments

Example

“What commitment actually fits the schedule you have?”

Avoid

- Pushing harder
- Treating capacity limits as lack of seriousness

IF THE PROBLEM IS COMPETING PRIORITIES

Consider

- Make the tradeoff explicit
- Clarify the current priority
- Temporarily pause or reduce the displaced goal when appropriate

Example

“When these two compete, which one are you actually choosing right now?”

Avoid

- Calling every tradeoff an excuse
- Deciding the priority hierarchy for the client

IF THE PROBLEM IS OVERWHELM

Consider

- Reduce the number of active commitments
- Establish priority order
- Clarify what can be deferred

Example

“Which one or two actually deserve active accountability this week?”

Avoid

- Creating detailed plans for every goal
- Making ten smaller commitments instead of reducing the active set

IF THE PROBLEM IS PERFECTIONISM

Consider

- Define the required standard
- Distinguish draft from final
- Separate required quality from preferred quality
- Create a clear completion threshold

Example

“What does this need to accomplish to be ready for this stage?”

Avoid

- Simply adding time
- Telling the client quality does not matter
- Forcing submission when legitimate quality requirements remain unresolved

IF THE CLIENT HAS LOST INTEREST

Consider

- Reassess the goal
- Pause
- Replace
- Close deliberately

Example

“Do you want this to remain an active goal?”

Avoid

- Increasing pressure
- Improving the schedule before confirming the goal still matters
- Using sunk cost as the main reason to continue

IF THE CLIENT IS DISCOURAGED

Consider

- Separate confidence from goal value
- Investigate why execution deteriorated
- Preserve the goal if it remains endorsed

Example

“Has the goal become less important, or are you discouraged because progress has been difficult?”

Avoid

- Reflexive motivation
- Premature closure
- Assuming continued desire means the plan should remain unchanged

IF THE PROBLEM IS POOR PLANNING

Consider

- Specify when
- Specify where, if relevant
- Create a protected execution window
- Use contingency planning selectively

Example

“When are the two actual sessions?”

Avoid

- Assuming the target is too large before testing implementation

IF THE PROBLEM IS MISSING EXPERTISE

Consider

- Identify prerequisite information
- Shift accountability temporarily to obtaining appropriate help
- Distinguish what the client can control

Example

“What do you need to learn or get answered before you can proceed?”

Avoid

- Pressure
- Calling confusion procrastination
- Providing specialized advice outside competence

IF THE COMMITMENT IS TOO VAGUE

Consider

Clarify:

- Action
- Quantity
- Frequency
- Completion standard
- Accountability period

Example

“What would count as meaningful completion this week?”

Avoid

- Retroactively inventing a success standard after the week is over

IF THE TASK IS TOO LARGE

Consider

- Identify meaningful components
- Choose the next substantial action
- Use engagement commitments when completion cannot reasonably be predicted

Example

“What is the first meaningful deliverable?”

Avoid

- Arbitrary tiny actions that do not advance the goal
- Vague encouragement to “just start”

IF THE CLIENT IS UNDERCOMMITTING

Consider

- Compare the target with historical capacity
- Clarify whether the small commitment is strategic or protective
- Establish a review point

Example

“Is this a deliberate re-entry step, or are you choosing a level that guarantees you cannot miss?”

Avoid

- Assuming smaller always means more realistic
- Imposing a large target immediately

IF THE CLIENT PARTIALLY COMPLETES

Consider

State the result accurately:

“Three of five happened.”

Then determine what accounted for the rest.

Avoid

“Three is basically five.”

or:

“You failed completely.”

IF THE PLAN HAS FAILED REPEATEDLY

Consider

- Stop treating each week as new
- Review accumulated evidence
- Ask what is changing
- Reassess the formulation
- Modify the structure when justified

Example

“What makes the same plan more likely to work this time?”

Avoid

- “Try again” indefinitely
- Automatically lowering the goal
- Escalating pressure without understanding the cause

IF THE CLIENT SUCCEEDS

Consider

- Acknowledge accurately
- Determine whether anything useful was learned
- Maintain the commitment when appropriate
- Increase only when the evidence and goal justify it
- Reduce accountability if behavior is independently stable

Example

“All three happened. Do you want to keep the same level?”

Avoid

- Exaggerated praise
- Automatic escalation
- Unnecessary analysis

IF THE CLIENT COMPLETES THE GOAL

Consider

- Explicitly close the goal
- Identify any useful learning
- Allow no immediate replacement goal if none is wanted

Example

"That goal is complete. We can close it."

Avoid

- Automatically creating a harder goal
- Maintaining accountability around a completed outcome

IF THE ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESS IS BECOMING THE PROBLEM

Possible Signs

- Client waits for permission
- Client waits for reminders before acting
- Practitioner makes most commitment decisions
- Discussion replaces execution
- Practitioner keeps escalating monitoring
- Rapport prevents challenge
- Practitioner becomes attached to one interpretation

Consider

- Reduce unnecessary prompting
- Return decision ownership
- Examine practitioner contribution
- Change accountability intensity
- Repair the process directly

IF THE ISSUE IS OUTSIDE ACCOUNTABILITY SCOPE

Consider

- Acknowledge relevant context
- State the boundary
- Identify what accountability can still support
- Refer to appropriate expertise when necessary

Example

"I cannot determine which medical treatment is appropriate. I can help you stay accountable to scheduling the consultation and following the plan you choose with your clinician."

THE RESPONSE-MATCHING TEST

Before responding, ask:

What problem am I trying to address?

What evidence supports that formulation?

Does my response actually address that problem?

Am I using my favorite intervention automatically?

Am I changing the goal merely because it was missed?

Am I preserving a failed plan merely to appear rigorous?

Is there a simpler response that would be sufficient?

Does the client still own the decision?

THE CENTRAL PRINCIPLE

Do not ask:

"What is the supportive response?"

Do not ask:

“What is the toughest response?”

Ask:

“What response best fits what is actually happening?”