



accountabili-buddy

CLARITY. COMMITMENT. FOLLOW THROUGH.



REFERENCE
SHEETS

REFERENCE SHEET 6

EXPLANATION IS NOT EXEMPTION

A client's explanation matters. It helps determine what happened and what should happen next.

But an explanation does not automatically mean:

- The commitment should be reduced
- The deadline should move
- The miss should be treated as unavoidable
- The goal should be abandoned
- No further accountability is needed

The professional task is to determine **what the explanation actually means for the commitment.**

STEP 1: ESTABLISH THE EXPLANATION

Examples:

"I was too busy."

"I forgot."

"I was overwhelmed."

"Work came up."

"I did not have the energy."

"The task took longer than I expected."

These statements provide information. They do not yet determine the response.

STEP 2: TEST CAUSAL RELEVANCE

Ask:

Did this factor actually prevent the action?

or:

Did it make the action more difficult but still possible?

or:

Was it present without being the primary reason for the miss?

EXAMPLE: "I DIDN'T HAVE TIME"

Possible meanings:

Genuine Capacity Problem

The client had no realistic opportunity to act.

Competing Priority

Time existed originally, but something legitimately more important displaced the commitment.

Poor Planning

Enough total time existed, but none was protected for the task.

Avoidance

Usable time existed, but the client repeatedly chose not to engage with the task.

The same sentence can therefore lead to very different accountability responses.

EXAMPLE: "I WAS OVERWHELMED"

Possible meanings:

Too Many Active Commitments

The client is carrying more than current capacity supports.

Poor Prioritization

The workload is manageable, but everything is being treated as equally urgent.

Perfectionism

The client is increasing the amount of work by applying unnecessarily demanding standards.

Avoidance

The client completes many other tasks but repeatedly leaves one specific action untouched.

Do not respond to the word **overwhelmed**. Respond to what the evidence shows is contributing to the overwhelm.

WHEN AN EXPLANATION IS SUFFICIENT

Sometimes the explanation fully accounts for the miss.

Example:

"My flight was canceled and I spent Saturday getting home."

If the commitment was planned for Saturday, the explanation may require no deeper inquiry.

Professional Response:

"Understood. Do you want to move it to Sunday or keep the normal schedule next week?"

No hidden cause needs to be found.

WHEN AN EXPLANATION IS TRUE BUT INCOMPLETE

Example:

"Work was extremely busy."

Further information:

"I also had two available evenings but kept putting the call off."

Work pressure may be real. It does not fully explain the missed action.

Professional Response:

"Work clearly reduced your capacity, but it sounds like the call was also being avoided when time appeared. Which factor mattered more?"

WHEN THE SAME EXPLANATION REPEATS

A reason can be legitimate and still reveal a broader pattern.

Example:

"Work got busy."

Week 1: Legitimate emergency

Week 2: Optional overtime

Week 3: Volunteered for another project

Week 4: Work again displaced the personal goal

The accountability question may eventually become:

"Is work repeatedly taking this time from you, or are you consistently choosing work when the two goals compete?"

WHEN THE EXPLANATION CHANGES BUT THE RESULT DOES NOT

Example:

Week 1: "I forgot."

Week 2: "I was tired."

Week 3: "Work got busy."

Week 4: "The timing was bad."

Each reason may be true. But a stable outcome with changing explanations may indicate a more stable underlying issue.

Useful Question:

"The reason has changed each week, but the result has stayed the same. What do you think is consistently happening underneath the different weeks?"

DO NOT AUTOMATICALLY ACCEPT

Weak Accountability:

"That makes sense. Let's lower the goal."

Do not lower the goal before determining whether lowering it actually addresses the problem.

DO NOT AUTOMATICALLY REJECT

Weak Accountability:

"That sounds like an excuse."

Do not reject the explanation before determining whether it is legitimate.

DO NOT ARGUE ABOUT THE EXPLANATION

The Accountabili-Buddy does not need to prove the client wrong. Instead, ask questions that make the explanation testable.

Instead of:

"You had time."

Use:

"Were there any realistic opportunities during the week when you could have done it?"

Instead of:

"You are making excuses."

Use:

"Does that explain the whole miss, or was something else also happening?"

EXPLANATION ≠ JUSTIFICATION

A useful distinction:

Explanation

Why the behavior occurred.

Justification

Whether the behavior or change in commitment was reasonable under the circumstances.

The first does not automatically establish the second.

Example:

"I did not go because I did not feel like it."

That may be an accurate explanation. It does not automatically establish that the commitment should be reduced.

EXPLANATION ≠ FORMULATION

The client may say:

"I forgot."

The professional formulation might ultimately be:

- Weak implementation structure
- Low priority
- Avoidance
- Genuine memory failure

The client's explanation is evidence used to build the formulation. It is not automatically the formulation itself.

THE PROFESSIONAL SEQUENCE

When a client gives a reason:

- 1. Hear it accurately.**
- 2. Determine whether it sufficiently explains the behavior.**
- 3. Look for contradictory or additional evidence.**
- 4. Decide what the explanation means for the current commitment.**
- 5. Match the response to the actual problem.**

CORE QUESTIONS

Ask:

Is this explanation sufficient?

Is it true but incomplete?

Is it recurring?

Does the behavior contradict it?

Does it indicate a problem with the goal, commitment, plan, priority, or execution?

What would actually need to change if this explanation is correct?

THE CENTRAL PRINCIPLE

An explanation should improve the accountability decision.

It should not function automatically as either:

an excuse

or

an exemption.