
Understanding accountability

Table of contents

Executive summary	2
Introduction	3
Accountability for those holding responsibility in Advance	4
Accountability for lead elders of Advance partner churches	5
Accountability for eldership teams who partner with Advance	6
Restoration of an individual leader	8

Executive summary

The foundation of accountability is rooted in various scriptures, emphasizing the significance of personal sincerity over systems. The document details and explains the accountability structures for those holding roles within Advance, underscoring three main circles of accountability: marriage, local eldership team, and Advance itself.

Lead elders of Advance partner churches are encouraged to consider their eldership team as their primary accountability environment, while also fostering relationships outside the team.

Finally, eldership teams partnering with Advance are urged to remain receptive to the perspectives of their congregation and trusted Advance leaders, to ensure a holistic approach to accountability.

The document closes with the consideration of congregants appealing directly to Advance in situations of concern.

We will look at this topic under the following headings:

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ Accountability for those holding responsibility in Advance
- ▶ Accountability for lead elders of Advance partner churches
- ▶ Accountability for eldership teams who partner with Advance
- ▶ Restoration
- ▶ Some cases studies for group discussion

Introduction

A simple definition of accountability could be 'to be regularly answerable, in personal humility and honesty, about key areas of our life to the appropriate people'.

Hebrews 12:1 contends for us to "run with endurance the race that is set before us." It is essential for each of us to navigate our journey with diligence, striving to finish well. Stirred by Romans 12:10's call to "love one another with brotherly affection" recognising our own weaknesses as depicted in 2 Corinthians 12:9, and holding reverence for God as Proverbs 9:10 highlights, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," we are all the more committed to the importance of accountability within our movement and church.

Understanding the distinct roles within our community, it's prudent to question the responsibilities and duties each one upholds.

Accountability can be rooted in James 5:16: "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed." This speaks to our need to consistently stand answerable, displaying true humility and honesty.

It's paramount, as Ephesians 4:25 instructs, to "put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbour," understanding that genuine accountability is built on personal sincerity, not just on systems. If I am not honest and open, then no system, or set of questions, or caring friends, will make me so.

Advance leans into the biblical principle found in Matthew 18:15-17, resolving conflicts through personal relationships. Yet, as growth and change occur, it may be necessary to augment this approach with more structured means, ensuring our actions always reflect the heart of Scripture.

Accountability for those holding responsibility in Advance

(e.g. those who are part of the leadership of a hub, continent, or on the global team).

It is helpful to think in terms of (at least) three concentric circles of accountability

MARRIAGE:

A spouse must feel the freedom, and the obligation, to hold their spouse to account, and if necessary to seek help outside their marriage. Seeking help for your marriage, or spouse, is a sign of loyalty and integrity, not betrayal.

LOCAL ELDERSHIP TEAM:

All who play a leadership role in Advance must be a meaningful part of a local church eldership team, unless in plant phase and this context doesn't exist, and must see their local eldership team as their primary context for accountability for life and ministry - more so than to any one in Advance, and fellow elders have a much closer proximity to observe inconsistencies in life, ministry, marriage or parenting. Also, in a crisis, the local eldership team, not the Advance team that they are part of, would provide the majority of the counsel and care.

ADVANCE:

For those part of an Advance team of some sort, their Advance colleagues provide another (lessor) forum for accountability. Advancers have the privilege of observing each other in various ministry contexts, prayer contexts, unpressured relational contexts, and therefore we can play a role in terms of accountability. Our relational culture makes space for confrontation to happen naturally in a 'non- confrontational' manner, often simply involving honest conversations resulting in minor course-corrections in our heads, hearts and ministries. However, in serious matters, especially where a non- confrontational approach proved unproductive, we would not shy away from loving, yet direct confrontation. Depending on the seriousness of the issue, we would likely also 'check in' with the local eldership team that the brother belongs to. Therefore, it is important that there are meaningful relationships between the local eldership team and other Advancers. In serious situations, the local elders and Advance would likely want to work together in trying to help the brother come good. If the two 'voices' disagreed in their perspective, each would need to take the action they deemed necessary. For example, whilst Advance doesn't have authority to step him down from local church ministry (that is the role of the local elders), they do have the authority to step him down from Advance-related ministry.

Our philosophy of 'married couples together on mission as much as possible' also assists mutual accountability, as it is not just the man who is involved with relationships in Advance.

Also, those on various Advance teams make sure that they (at least some of them) develop a close relationship with each other's local eldership teams, so that it is easy and natural to collaborate with the eldership team around the person's well-being. Those who play a leadership role in Advance would encourage their local elders to interact directly with their Advance colleagues around any matter, particularly if they are concerned about any aspect of their life or ministry.

Accountability for lead elders of Advance partner churches

*Please note: content here below - mentions 3 concentric circles but only lists two - i think

It is also helpful here to think in terms of (minimally) three concentric circles

MARRIAGE:

A spouse must feel the freedom, and the obligation, to hold their spouse to account, and if necessary to seek help outside their marriage. Seeking help for your marriage, or spouse, is a sign of loyalty and integrity, not betrayal.

LOCAL ELDERSHIP TEAM:

Lead elders should consider their eldership team to be the primary environment for their personal accountability for life and ministry. They might also have excellent relationships outside the eldership team (in or outside Advance) that contribute some meaningful aspects of accountability and support, but to preserve the integrity of the eldership team, it is important that the lead elder is primarily, and genuinely, personally accountable to his fellow elders. Local elders should feel the freedom to raise an issue with their lead elder without fear of rebuff.

If the local eldership team is unable to resolve a matter with their lead elder, they should feel the freedom to talk to the Advance leader(s) who serve their church without fear of rebuff. A wise lead elder would make sure his fellow elders know that they are free to do this. A wise lead elder would also give his elders freedom, even encouragement, to chat directly to the Advance leaders about him, long before any issue became a big issue – prevention is usually the best cure.

If the two 'voices' disagreed in their perspective, each would need to take the action they deemed necessary. For example, whilst Advance doesn't have authority to step him down from local church ministry (that is the role of the local elders), they do have the authority to step him down from Advance- related ministry.

Accountability for eldership teams who partner with Advance

Up until now, we have considered 'personal' accountability. It is now time to think about how an entire eldership team can stay accountable. Again, let's think in terms of three concentric circles of accountability

THEMSELVES:

The plurality of a local eldership goes a long way to self-correcting internal blind spots and weaknesses and generally keeping an eldership team self-accountable. However, it does not go the whole way, and a wise and humble eldership team will recognize two other forums of accountability.

THEIR LOCAL CONGREGATION:

Although elders know that they are authorized by God, and their congregation to lead their congregation, a wise and humble eldership will remain open to the perspective and concerns of their congregation. Wise elders would communicate to their church that any member may raise concerns about an elder(s), with any elder(s), at any time without fear of rebuff.

ADVANCE:

Local elders of Advance churches are encouraged to give one or two trusted Advance leaders a 'standing invitation' to bring their external eyes and observations to the team, and to ask questions at any time. This is a significant step towards part-answering the age old question by the Roman poet, Satires', "*Quis custodiet ipsos custodiet?*" (Who guards the guards?). Of course, trust grows over time, but trusted, consistent friend(s) to an eldership team can be much more valuable than having a consultant in from time to time who knows little of the history and dynamics of the eldership team.

RELATED QUESTIONS:

Can congregants appeal directly to Advance if, having exhausted all internal forms of appeal to their elders, they remain concerned?

Each eldership needs to decide what they say to their church about this, although it is hard to see how an eldership could prevent this happening, even if they wanted to. That said, eldership teams that I have led have always told their church that they are welcome, even encouraged, to appeal to Advance in such a situation, as we only see benefits in such a policy.

We trust the Advance leaders who work closely with our church, and we would welcome their perspective on any issue at any time, whether we requested it, or a congregant did.

Congregants also feel reassured by this display of security and humility by the elders, and they tend not to abuse the privilege.

A congregant(s) is only likely to approach Advance directly if (a) there is a truly massive crisis looming in our church, or (b) because the congregant is a trouble-maker. Either way, outside perspective would only benefit the elders.

How would Advance appropriately handle a situation where a local church was being damaged by the beliefs, practices or sinful actions of a local eldership team?

Some people argue that movements should have ultimate authority over their partner churches precisely to help guard against this kind of situation. Although this might be a convenient policy in this kind of extreme situation, our ecclesiology convinces us that local elders really are the highest human authority in a local church. Also, we should note that this kind of situation happens so rarely that it seems pragmatically unwise to build a whole process around exceptions. So, how would Advance handle such a situation? It is impossible to pre-empt all the different possible scenarios, but we can broadly say the following:

In view of the meaningful nature of our partnership (i.e. local eldership teams being meaningfully and personally connected to Advance), we would hope that such a situation would be pre-empted long before it reached crisis.

Advance leaders closest to the church would probably be invited to help by a party in the church (either by an elder[s], or some members), and would respond accordingly to that invitation.

If no such invitation came, but there was clearly a need for intervention, then Advance would appeal to the parties concerned. This would be done respectfully, yet with confidence in the Lord and his Word. We would try to do it face to face at first (i.e. we would visit the elders and church), rather than via email. (The more extreme and obvious the sin or error of the elders, the firmer the external intervention could be, if necessary. In extreme cases, it is likely that non-Advance local churches in the area would also be getting involved to protect the sheep.)

If our recommendations were not heeded, we reserve the right to remove the church from the movement, making sure that the congregation were aware of our reasons. We would do all we could to help care for the various parties concerned, working with other churches in the area in the event of wide-spread fallout.

Restoration of an individual leader

As we have already said, in normal circumstances the local eldership team would take the lead in the restoration of an Advance leader, although Advance would probably be involved in a support capacity. Therefore, this section is really some brief advice to a local eldership team about the restoration process.

Restoration is first and foremost back to the Lord before it is a restoration to ministry. A restoration process solely focused on a return to ministry will likely overlook key heart work involved in lasting restoration.

Restoration back to ministry essentially depends on three main things: the level of repentance, the level of trust, and nature of the sin and the circumstances. For example, if the sin revealed a history of deceit over many years, then trust will take longer to rebuild than if the sin was something of a 'one off'.

Initial confession, as opposed to being 'found out,' is a significant and positive first step in the process of restoration.

A clear process, with clear markers, will serve the person involved, their spouse, and other parties. For example, there needs to be clarity around who plays what role in the couples' lives. Who is providing professional counselling (if necessary)? Who is providing spiritual support? How often do the elders check in with the couple? Where necessary, there also needs to be clarity on finances. For example, if the person can no longer work for the church, then there needs to be a clear plan in terms of finances for the transition period into another job.

Because restoration is essentially a 'heart work', it is usually unwise to have a 'finish date' planned. If the agenda of the person being restored seems to be 'how soon until I can get back into ministry?' rather than 'I need significant time to restore my relationship with the Lord, and significant others, and to work on my heart', then the process will need to go much slower. It might be wise to say, 'The question of whether/when you will return to ministry is one that we will only consider after time period X'. A blend of local elders (who can observe and assist the person on a day-to-day basis), and external Advance leaders (who can provide objective perspective, and additional spiritual influence), makes for a strong and balanced team to help confront, discipline, and restore an elder, particularly a lead elder. It is also important that at the end of the season of restoration there is a clear, credible group to give him a 'clean bill of health' (or not).

If it is not possible for restoration to happen within the same local church, then it is usually best for restoration to happen within another Advance partner church, or failing that, in another local church under those local elders, assisted and supported by Advance leaders. It is seldom preferable for the person to disappear off to a church/movement with no previous, or on-going connection with those who he has walked with for years.

