



No Brown M&M's

Why Accountability Lives in the Details



IAMLeadership Alliance



**Global
Moving
Foundation**

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In high-performing organizations, failures rarely begin with a crisis. More often, it starts with small, ignored inconsistencies, unclear instructions, misaligned assumptions, incomplete handoffs, and silent agreements. These are not minor issues; they are early operational signals.

This framework equips leaders to:

- Identify where execution is quietly breaking down
- Diagnose root causes beneath surface-level issues
- Translate details into proactive leadership action, rather than after-action repair

Purpose of this discussion:

This worksheet is not about blaming people or pointing fingers. It is about noticing early warning signs in daily work - the small details, assumptions, and signals that often go unnoticed until they become bigger problems. The goal is to practice curiosity, clarity, and shared accountability, so that issues can be addressed early, constructively, and without judgment.

No Brown M&M's – Why Accountability Lives in the Detail

Leadership Application Worksheet for Group Discussions, round table format to find your Brown M&M's

Signal Identification: What's your Brown M&M Story?

Reflect and share a Brown M&M Story...

What happened, no judgement, fact based, if you had a do-over, what would be different? What would be the same, what do you want for the future?

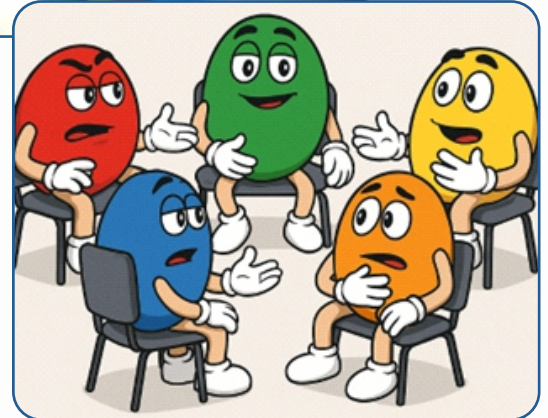
When you look back, where did the issue most likely originate?

- Unclear or incomplete communication
- Unclear ownership or responsibility
- Different assumptions about what “done” or “agreed” meant



Group Discussion topics and prompts:

- a. Unclear or conflicting instructions
- b. Inconsistent processes across teams
- c. Overlooked safety details
- d. Silent agreement in meeting



Where do critical details often get lost with your team?

- a. Day-to-day operations and handoffs
- b. Cross-department communication
- c. Onboarding or launching new projects
- d. Client interactions and expectations
- e. Contract terms and SLA expectations, market-specific differences (e.g. U.S. vs. Asia) are not being clearly translated
- f. Flow down of information to stakeholders
- g. Remote or hybrid work environments (e.g., handoffs, time zones, informal communication gaps)

Mixed Messages

- a. Field teams misread SOPs
- b. Leadership assumes alignment
- c. Silent agreement leads to a big failure
- e. Culture: The “Yes” that wasn't a “Yes”





The Hidden Cost of Miscommunication

Which type of miscommunication is most damaging to performance?

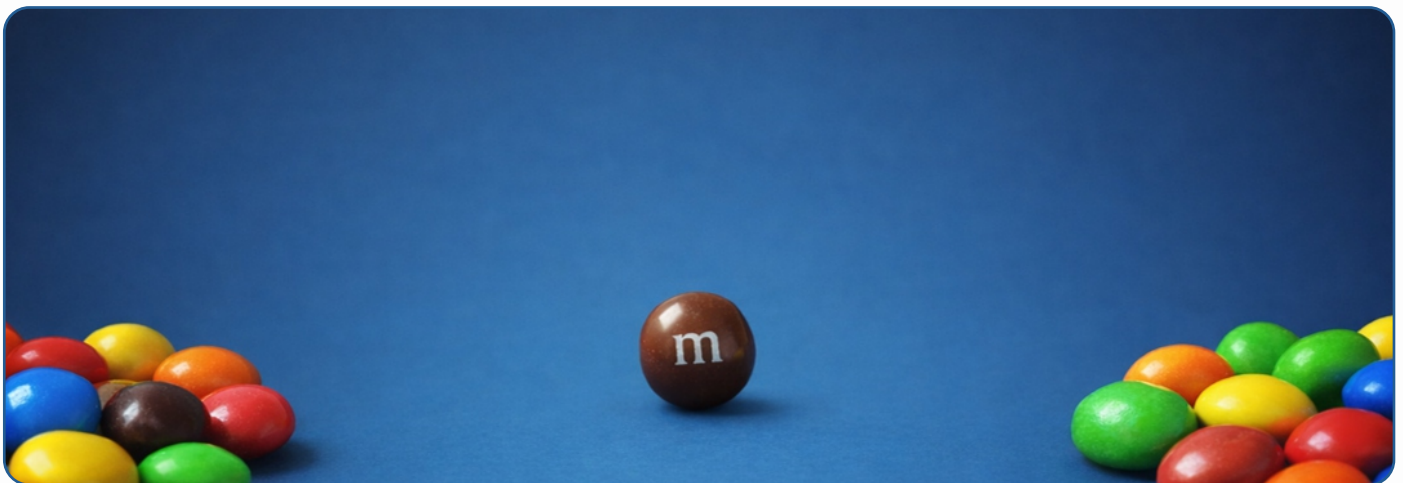
- a. Assuming alignment that never existed
- b. SOPs being read differently in the field
- c. “Yes” that wasn't really a yes
- d. Information failing to reach the right people in time
- e. Different communication styles and generational expectations creating unspoken gaps

What's the first accountability action you'll take after this session?

To turn insight into action, think about one small, concrete step you can take immediately after this session.

Optional: What is one action you can commit to in the next 7 days?

- a. Actively look for “Brown M&Ms” in my own work
- b. Focus on creating clarity in team communication
- c. Model accountability for my team
- d. Share one insight from today with my colleagues





Additional Resource Materials

[Brown M&Ms Why Accountability Lives in the Detail \(IAM Learning Session\)](#)

A recorded session that walks through the Brown M&M's framework, real-world examples, and group discussion from the IAM Leadership Alliance Council.

[Brown M&Ms Concept Story \(David Lee Roth\)](#)

A short video featuring David Lou Roth explaining the origin and meaning of the Brown M&M's metaphor, providing context for understanding the power of detail in accountability.

[Accountability Ladder](#)

A leadership framework that shows how individuals and teams move from reactive behaviors toward ownership, problem solving and purposeful action.