I received a call recently from a client who wanted to have me work with a group of managers that was unproductive, in conflict and generally troublesome. I had worked with another division of the same company a couple of years ago and the director of this group wanted me to perform the same “magic” for his team. He wanted to know how I had accomplished the change with the other group.

I'm good, but I really don't have any fairy dust. Instead, I had to reveal my secret to the caller: accountability. Before I work with a group like this -- or even begin executive coaching of an individual client -- I first make sure that the organization has held them accountable. They need to know that acquiring conflict management skills, people skills, or whatever, is mandatory, not just some kind of optional educational opportunity.

If someone comes to me who is on a performance improvement plan, final written warning, or some other kind of “write-up”, they are motivated to change. They need to know before I start working with them that there will be consequences for their own failure to acquire new skills and get with the program. Otherwise, all of my magic interventions will be for naught.

These kinds of skills are not rocket science, but they do require employees to want to change. You, as their manager, need to make sure that they are motivated to change.

Once you've provided them the motivation, my work can begin, but without that, change is unlikely.