

Learn to delegate



Delegating is the act of assigning formal tasks and responsibilities to a subordinate, together with the necessary authority to carry them out. There are benefits of delegating, including saving time and motivating subordinates. When an employee is empowered to act, and the supervisor remains accountable for the outcome, everybody wins. Other benefits include:

- Developing new skills in subordinates.
- Developing internal ownership of the work goal.
- Fostering initiative and responsibilities.
- Giving employees the option to choose methods that work best for them.
- Encouraging self-leadership.

Unfortunately, many managers aren't good at delegating, or don't do it as often as they should. They may fear that mistakes will happen, or they initially don't have time to coach someone through the delegation process because certain tasks may require training. Here are other reasons people choose not to delegate:

- Fear of surrendering authority.
- Lack of confidence in employees.
- Fear of having nothing to do or appearing lazy.

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- Belief that subordinates are too busy; you don't want to burden them.
- Poor definition of duties.
- Enjoy doing jobs yourself.

Ultimately, delegation builds stronger, more effective teams. Here are eight steps to help you get started.

STEP 1: Determine the task, project, or area of work to delegate

It's important to understand the difference between suitable and unsuitable tasks for delegation. Look for tasks someone else can do better based on their skills or experience; routine activities, such as data entry; and tasks that are time-critical, but not a high priority.

STEP 2: Select the appropriate person and assess their ability and training needs

Once you have determined the appropriate tasks, you need to select a suitable person. Look for someone with the right skills, and who could benefit professionally from the assignment. Make sure you are willing to provide the time necessary to train them before you hold them accountable. Finally, be cautious of asking for volunteers. The person you need may not be interested or have the confidence. It is best to "select" the person you think is best for the task.

STEP 3: Define the level of authority

You must give the person enough authority to get the work done, take the necessary initiative, and keep things running smoothly in your absence. The employee must understand what actions they can take on their own, and what requires approval. Clarification of authority levels is

important when assigning responsibilities, especially when it comes to spending funds or making policy decisions.

The three authority levels are:

- Direct Control (go ahead—do it without consultation),
- Indirect Control (make recommendations for approval, then act), and
- No Control (I need to decide that first).

STEP 4: Spell out the delegation

The employee needs to receive understandable instructions relating to outcomes. The employee will need to know objectives or goals, how to execute the task in general, resources required, checkpoints or milestones, and deadlines.

STEP 5: State task expectations or required results; agree on a deadline

Specify the deadline so they understand parameters and tell them how they can tell the task is completed successfully. Clarify how they will be measured—will it be speed, quality, creativity? A combination? What will you take as an indicator of success? The employee needs a clear understanding of responsibility. You decide the level of responsibility. Let them decide “how.” Ask for feedback from the employee to be sure they understand the objectives.

STEP 6: Monitor progress and hold people accountable

Keep control when managing through others, but don't micro-manage. If problems occur, make necessary adjustments (budget, time limit, etc.) People sometimes make mistakes, or even drop the ball. Follow up allows you to stay informed on progress and make adjustments as needed.

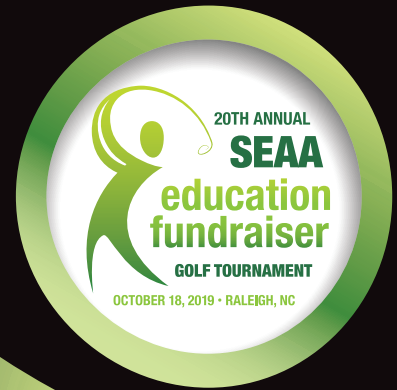
Make sure your employees are getting the information needed for decision making. People can become frustrated when they want to do a good job but do not have the resources or knowledge. A simple checkup meeting ensures they are on-task or finds out why they aren't. Avoid asking, “How is it going?” Instead ask them to show you progress.

STEP 7: Coach your staff

They are learning and won't necessarily take the path you would have. The employee needs support and the ability to communicate with you. Provide feedback. Let them know when they are doing well and when they need to correct something. It is always motivating to hear, “Hey, you're coming along well with that project! Good job.” Maybe you have suggestions on how he or she can save additional time, money, etc. In general, it is good to ask before giving this kind of feedback. Delegate the objective, not the procedure.

STEP 8: Allow staff to work

Get out of their way and let them do a good job. Don't measure employees by whether they do a certain task the way you would. The employee may have a more effective way of doing something. Remember, one of the best ways of learning something is through making mistakes. Ask what they learned from their error and what they would do differently next time. Other tips include reviewing the progress on the agreed-upon reporting dates, and refraining from second-guessing decisions. ○



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