

Can't do it all yourself? Learn to delegate.

By Preston Ingalls

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 to the process:

- It saves time and motivates your subordinates by demonstrating you trust them and value their abilities.
- The employee is empowered to act; the supervisor remains accountable for the outcome.
- The supervisor retains accountability to his/her superiors.
- It builds and develops new skills in subordinates.
- Develops internal ownership of the work goal.
- It fosters initiative and responsibilities.
- It provides ample information to employees.
- It allows employees to choose methods and engage in improving the enterprise.
- It encourages self-leadership.

With all those benefits, why don't we do it better? There are numerous reasons, including the fear of mistakes and lack of time. People may make mistakes, and you will have to help. And, certain tasks may require training, of which you don't want to take the time or you think you can do it faster. There are other reasons:

- Fear of surrendering authority
- Fear of having nothing to do
- Fear of appearing lazy
- Enjoy doing jobs yourself
- Belief that subordinates are too busy; you don't want to burden them
- Poor definition of duties
- Too nice to "dump" a project or task on someone else
- Lack of confidence in employees
- "What happens if something goes wrong?"
- Your own inflated self-image

To get you moving and delegating in the right direction, here is an eight-step method to guide your delegation efforts.

Step 1: Determine the task, project, or area of work to delegate. What is the difference between suitable and unsuitable tasks to delegate? Below are some of the "right" kinds of tasks to delegate:

- Tasks someone else can do better due to their experience and skills



- Routine activities such as data entry
- 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 the suitable person(s). Ask yourself: Which staff member(s) could perform the task? Which staff member(s) could benefit from this assignment? Is this person capable in the areas for which I am holding them accountable? If not, am I willing and able to take the time to train them?

Be careful when asking for volunteers. The person you need may not be interested or have the confidence, or someone who is incapable may volunteer. It is best to "select" a person or persons.

Step 3: Define the level of authority. When delegating work and responsibility, 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. There are three authority levels: Direct Control (go ahead—do it without consultation), Indirect Control (*make recommendations for approval, then act*), No Control (*I need to decide that first*). It helps to avoid confusion when it comes to spending funds or making policy decisions. Clarification of authority levels is important when assigning responsibilities.

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—

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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, "So Bill, what is your understanding of your objectives for this project? Explain to me what authority you feel you have been given and why." If they can't explain accurately, they didn't understand. Start over.

Step 6: Monitor progress and hold people accountable. Keep control when managing through others, but don't micromanage. If problems occur, make necessary adjustments (budget, time limit, etc.) People sometimes make mistakes, or even drop the ball—recognize it. Remember ... follow-up and follow through early, and set up way to provide you with feedback to keep yourself informed of progress. 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 with...?" and instead ask, "Can you show me where we are with...?"

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 and may experience difficulties requiring your help. The employee needs to know how you think they are doing on the project. 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. If delegation is to work, you must let employees do things their way. The employee may have a more effective way of doing something. Don't measure employees by whether they do a certain task the way you would. When you second-guess your employees, you may harm their self-confidence.

One of the best ways of learning something is through making mistakes. Ask what they learned from their error. What would they do different the next time? Accept mistakes that aren't caused by idleness (doing things versus not doing anything). Other pointers:

- Review the progress on the agreed-upon reporting dates.
- Do not constantly look over their shoulders. Avoid using language like, "Well, if I was you I would do it this way."
- Trust your employee to do well; allow for self-correction
- Don't second-guess him/her. You wouldn't have chosen the employee for the task if you didn't believe they could handle it.

Now that you have the tools, get out there and start building some folks. ■



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