
SUCCESS THROUGH DELEGATION

10 Tips for Effective Delegation

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"There are three ways to get something done. Do it yourself, delegate, or forbid your kids to do it"

Unknown

One of the most important ways to leverage time is through delegation. As a leader, manager, supervisor, or employee, finding ways to free up time to accomplish important priorities is essential for getting more done in less time with less effort. In fact one of the first questions of any effective manager or leader facing a task should be, "Who else can I get to do this?" Using delegation as a fulcrum point easily doubles or triples productivity. Even if you have no work-place authority with which to delegate, you can always negotiate work-place job sharing, delegate tasks at home (cleaning, gardening etc.), and even delegate to time*.

Effective delegation means more than dishing out jobs for others to do. Once you've determined one's suitability and eligibility for a task, the challenge is in finding the balance between letting a project go while guiding it towards successful completion. Micromanaging de-motivates the delegate and slows down progress, while passing off all control and responsibility is a formula for failure. Ultimately *you* as the *delegator* are accountable for successful outcomes. Effective delegation is therefore a learned skill that when properly implemented, produces successful results on time with no surprises.

Here are ten tips and tactics for implementing a successful delegation program.

1. KNOW YOUR GOALS

First define what you want to achieve in writing. State it in the form of a goal (please see Lorna Riley's article on Goal Setting). The more specific and measurable your goal statement, i.e. "Interview 20 division chiefs within the next two months to determine their need for computer support from our office," the more pinpointed your target will be, thus making it easier to hit the mark. As *your* needs and goals change however, keep those who need to know in the loop. The first who needs to know is your delegate. Delegation requires a "systems" thinking approach where understanding how changes made in one area will impact results in others. Share information regularly and appropriately.

2. DEFINE SKILLS NEEDED FOR THE GOAL

Break the project down into the necessary behaviors, attitudes, and prior knowledge/skills needed to produce a successful outcome. For example, if you want someone to interview division chiefs to determine their need for computer support, you'll need someone with good interpersonal/listening skills and appropriate computer knowledge so that they can think "off script" and troubleshoot when necessary. Interviewing skills can be taught relatively quickly, but without people and computer skills in place for this particular goal, it would be a long haul getting someone up to speed in a reasonable amount of time.

3. PICK THE RIGHT DELEGATE

Find people you think are ready for the task or who are trainable. Delegation is an effective way to introduce succession planning--grooming others to take your place so that you can move onward and upward. It's also a great way to retain employees. When people feel needed and given opportunities to grow, their loyalty deepens as well. A person's readiness means considering each candidate's interest level in the task, his/her previous training, capability, and availability. Also determine if the project needs full-time attention. Very often managers work backward by having a candidate in mind, and then trying to make the person's qualifications fit the task. First define the skills needed for the task and then find the person who best fits the project's needs. In succession planning however, sometimes you'll be faced with making the person fit the job. Determine what training each succession candidate will need—i.e. coaching, reading, a seminar, one-on-one mentoring, and intensive skills course etc. and then provide the

necessary resources.

4. ESTABLISH STANDARDS AND EXPECTATIONS

Communicate the goal(s), standards of excellence, and any other expectations you have for successful completion of the project. To increase buy-in, create a collaborative “partnership” approach whenever possible, including the delegate in the project’s strategic planning. You may learn new ideas from the delegate that will enhance the outcomes. Explore strategies for achieving mutually agreed upon outcomes within realistic timeframes.

5. ESTABLISH PROJECT CHECKPOINTS

Establish a mutually acceptable, regularly scheduled checkpoint meeting schedule ahead of time. Also define expectations for what needs to be completed at each checkpoint to guide performance along the way. New employees require more frequent coaching and instructional checkpoints, while more experienced employees generally need less supervision. Between checkpoints, avoid hounding with see-through inquiries such as, "How's it going? Let me look over what you have so far." You may think it sounds like interest, but the delegate could interpret it as distrust or micromanagement.

6. MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE

If a delegate asks for help between meetings, don't turn him/her away. Let the delegate know that s/he is to check with you at non-scheduled points if unforeseen issues crop up or questions need clarification. You are a viable resource and should be included like any other resource necessary to complete the project. Don't assume however, that because an employee has had 10 years of experience that they've accumulated 10 years of new knowledge. They may have had *one* year of experience, 10 years in a row.

7. SHARE RESPONSIBILITIES AND POWER

Besides delegating the task, there's something else that needs to be delegated —authority over the project. Consider if the delegate needs signature approval, access codes, clerical help, confidential data etc. Ironically, managers and leaders gain power by empowering others. Determine what it takes to get the job done and then make sure s/he doesn't

constantly have to track you down for permission or resources. Along with this, consider boundaries of authority and clearly spell them out.

Be aware that you can reassign and delegate tasks, but you cannot escape ultimate responsibility and accountability for *your* assigned areas of responsibility. Authority is the right to take action in direction, coordinating the activities of others in achieving goals, and the right to use discretion. Responsibility is the obligation of subordinates to their superiors for performing certain duties; and the obligation of supervisors to provide proper guidance, support, resources, and trust.

8. DELEGATE THE WHOLE THING

"Owning" a job, or taking it from start to finish is highly motivating. If an employee is excited about a task, more energy will go into it. If the project is too large or complex however, it isn't feasible or advisable to delegate the entire project. When this happens, give employees well-defined chunks they can call their own. Keep them in the loop about how all the pieces work together. Be careful to plan far enough ahead though. It's frustrating for employees to meet deadlines only to learn that the project's stalled because you've failed to plan the next step.

9. KEEP YOUR COOL WHEN MISTAKES ARE MADE

People aren't machines. Sometimes, even after implementing the right steps and laying out solid plans, something goes wrong. When delegates make mistakes, keep them involved. Offer to work with them, but give them responsibility for solving the problem they've created. Withdrawing the task as soon as something goes awry not only puts you back to square one, but you've also just lost a great training opportunity on how to handle future similar situations. At the very least, withdrawal stirs up morale issues from which the employee may never recover.

10. DELEGATE DEMOCRATICALLY

Spread the work around. Try not to delegate grunt work or the least appealing projects to the same employees. If there are unpleasant tasks, everyone should get a turn at the helm.

*** NOTE: Delegate to Time**

You need not always delegate to a person. Some things can be delegated to time. Sometimes issues sort themselves out without intervention, allowing time to work its magic—mending a relationship, healing an illness, or ignoring “mole hills” will successfully resolve a situation that could have been exacerbated with human interference.

Delegation may sound like work, but like any time investment, the effort it takes up front will pay off in handsome dividends over time. Think of the long-term implications of “cloning” those aspects of your work that can be done by others. If you truly want to make a difference, you can help yourself by helping others. Delegate, delegate, delegate!

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